

## Multiple Sacralities: Rethinking Sacralizations in European History. Ein Europa der Differenzen, Band 3

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BAND 3

EIN EUROPA DER DIFFERENZEN



Bernhard Gissibl  
Andrea Hofmann (eds.)

# Multiple Sacralities

Rethinking Sacralizations in European History



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Instituts für Europäische Geschichte Mainz

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Johannes Paulmann und Nicole Reinhardt

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Rethinking Sacralizations in European History

Edited by  
Bernhard Gissibl and Andrea Hofmann

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Mainz, July 2023

Bernhard Gissibl

Andrea Hofmann



Bernhard Gissibl/Andrea Hofmann

## Sacralizations as Cultural Practices

### An Introduction

How do we account for the multiplicity of sacred forms in the pluralist societies of today's Europe? How do we account for the persistence and remarkable adaptability of traditional forms of the Christian sacred? How do we explain the ongoing allure of instrumentalizing the sacred for political purposes, including warfare and the execution of excessive violence? And what do we make of the spread of nature spiritualities that have been so pertinent over the last half century that scholars wonder about the emergence of a new kind of »dark green religion«? This volume seeks to reflect upon these multiple sacralizations and how they can be studied and understood in historical and cross-disciplinary perspective. Let's have a glance at the three questions raised, as they illustrate the potentials and problems of sacralizations as a cultural practice, in fields as varied as religion, culture and politics, or the environment.

Rome, Saint Peter's Square, 5th January 2023. During the funeral service for the late Pope Emeritus Benedict XVI, some among the 50,000 attendants occasionally chanted or held banners demanding to declare him »santo subito« – make him a Saint instantly!<sup>1</sup> These chants were an – admittedly quite feeble – echo of the vociferous and intense demands for immediate sanctification of Benedict's papal precursor John Paul II. After the latter's death in April 2005, the Roman Catholic Church immediately took the necessary steps according to canon law to achieve his beatification in 2011, followed by his canonization in 2014. While being canonized within a decade after his death meant a new record within Church History, John Paul II was only the latest in a long row of papal and Christian saints since antiquity. As »godly humans« these Saints are attributed a special relation to God, they are – in Christianity as well as in other religions – »religiously exceptional humans« (*religiöse Ausnahmemenschen*, Wolfgang Speyer)<sup>2</sup>. Canonization in the Catholic Church follows a complex procedure, requiring, amongst others, proof that the individual

1 Alexander BRÜGGEMANN, Rufe nach »Santo Subito«. Eine Eiligsprechung für Benedikt XVI., in: Münchner Kirchenzeitung, 15th January 2023, p. 7.

2 Cf. Wolfgang SPEYER, Die Verehrung des Heroen, des göttlichen Menschen und des christlichen Heiligen. Analogien und Kontinuitäten, in: Peter DINZELBACHER / Dieter R. BAUER (eds.), Heiligenverehrung in Geschichte und Gegenwart, Ostfildern 1990,

in question has performed miracles after his or her death. Once canonized, the Saints serve as mediators between God and humans. In the case of John Paul II, his canonization was anticipated by the chanting crowds of believers assembled at his funeral. Thus, initiated by popular demand, the Curia's official process of canonization was only a second step. However, John Paul II was by no means the first or the only human elevated to the status of a saint by popular acclamation. A similar cultural logic was at work in the cases of Mahatma Gandhi, Martin Luther King, or Lady Diana. All these individuals stood out through their charitable engagement, the pursuit of highest ideals, and a tragic and violent death (or prolonged suffering in the case of John Paul II). Thus, distinguished as extra-ordinary, they became suitable symbols for transcendent values, as expressed in their cultural canonization by people and media<sup>3</sup>. Modern saints like John Paul II not only testify to the stubborn persistence of the Catholic sacred<sup>4</sup>. The cult of godly humans within and beyond institutionalized religions shows that there is a yearning for idols and miracles also in the 21st century, expressed in the asymmetric logic of sacred excellence and profane crowds and modelled on cultural patterns of often Biblical origin<sup>5</sup>. Religious and secular saints also raise the question in how far the heroes, stars, and idols of contemporary popular culture have in fact replaced earlier models of sainthood<sup>6</sup>, or if they actually enable each other: After all, the Catholic Saint may not have persisted into the 21st century without borrowing from secular forms of mediatized stardom<sup>7</sup>.

pp. 48–66; Peter GEMEINHARDT, *Die Heiligen. Von den frühchristlichen Märtyrern bis zur Gegenwart*, München 2010, pp. 7–12; Arnold ANGENENDT, *Heilige und Reliquien. Die Geschichte ihres Kultes vom frühen Christentum bis zur Gegenwart*, Hamburg <sup>2</sup>2007.

- 3 Hubertus LUTTERBACH, *Tot und heilig? Personenkult um »Gottesmenschen« in Mittelalter und Gegenwart*, Darmstadt 2008. The Protestant Church defines Saints according to *Confessio Augustana*, Article 21: »Vom heiligen dienst wirt von den unsern also geleret, das man der heiligen gedencken sol, auff das wir unsern glauben stercken, so wir sehen, wie ihnen gnad widerfaren, auch wie ihnen durch glauben geholffen ist, dazu, das man Exempel neme von iren guten wercken, ein jeder nach seinem beruff. [...]«, *Die Confessio Augustana (1530)*, introduced by Volker LEPPIN, in: Irene DINGEL (ed.), *Die Bekenntnisschriften der Evangelisch-Lutherischen Kirche*, Göttingen 2014, pp. 65–224, at p. 128.
- 4 Skye DONEY, *The Persistence of the Sacred. German Catholic Pilgrimage, 1832–1937*, Toronto 2022.
- 5 For systematic explorations of the interferences between Heroism and Sacrality see the publications emerging from the former SFB 948 at the University of Freiburg, e. g., Ronald G. ASCH et al. (eds.), *Sakralität und Heldentum*, Würzburg 2017.
- 6 See Jan N. BREMMER, *From Heroes to Saints and from Martyrological to Hagiographical Discourse*, in: ASCH et al. (eds.), *Sakralität und Heldentum*, pp. 35–66.
- 7 Cf. Stephan MOEBIUS, *Die Sakralisierung des Individuums. Eine religions- und herrschaftssoziologische Konzeptionalisierung der Sozialfigur des Helden*, in: Johanna ROLSHOVEN et al. (eds.), *Heroes – Repräsentationen des Heroischen in Geschichte*,

Stavropol, December 2022. The »Russian People's World Council«, an assembly convened by the Russian patriarch Kirill, devoted its meeting to the theme of »Holy War« and the »transfiguration of Russia«. It was one of repeated instances in which leaders of the Russian Orthodox Church legitimized Russia's imperial war against Ukraine in a terminology of sacred warfare. This is only the latest instance of how religious sacralizations have served as justification for the use of force and violence. Ever since 11th September 2001 and the consequent series of Islamist terrorist attacks in cities across Europe, there has been an intense debate about the return of fundamentalist religion and religiously motivated violence in secular Europe. This debate was fed and accompanied by a flurry of publications on jihad, »holy wars«, »sacred wrath« and »sacred terror« of varying analytical depth and intercultural expertise<sup>8</sup>. The killing of twelve journalists by two self-proclaimed Islamist assassins in an attack on the French satirical weekly *Charlie Hebdo* in January 2015 in Paris, following the publication of provocative cartoons of Prophet Mohammed, triggered extensive controversies over blasphemy and the limits of free speech<sup>9</sup>. This debate found a brief renewal after the stabbing of Salman Rushdie in New York in August 2022, a late echo of a call to murder (*fatwa*) proclaimed in 1989 by Muslim Iranian leader (Ayatollah) Ruhollah Khomeini for the alleged anti-Muslim blasphemies contained in Rushdie's novel *The Satanic Verses*<sup>10</sup>. These developments and their accompanying discourses were marked by sacralizations of war and violence and their all-too-ready conflation with »Islam« for political and xenophobic purposes; they were interpreted as desacralizing and vilifying attacks on the core and defining values of social formations on various scales, from religious minorities within societies to the »West« or the »Muslim World« at large. Consequently, the various communities of adherents involved in these conflicts sacralized not only war or core elements of Muslim faith but also democracy, free speech, and

Literatur und Alltag, Bielefeld 2018, pp. 41–65, URL: <<https://doi.org/10.1515/9783839441152-003>> (07-19-2023); Michael N. EBERTZ, Heroische Tugenden. Mehrung und Vernichtung, Kontrolle und Funktionalisierung des religiösen Heldencharismas in der römisch-katholischen Kirche, in: ASCH et al. (eds.), Sakralität und Heldenentum, pp. 67–86; ANGENENDT, Heilige und Reliquien, pp. 307–355.

- 8 Mark JUERGENSEMEYER, Terror in the Mind of God: The Global Rise of Religious Violence, Berkeley, CA 2017; Bassam TIBI, Der neue Totalitarismus. »Heiliger Krieg« und westliche Sicherheit, Darmstadt 2004; Guido KNOPP et al. (eds.), Der Heilige Krieg. Mohammed, die Kreuzritter und der 11. September, München 2011; Robin WRIGHT, Sacred Rage. The Wrath of Militant Islam, New York 2001.
- 9 Timothy Garton ASH, Free Speech: Ten Principles for a Connected World, London 2016.
- 10 See Manfred SING, The Politics of Religious Outrage: The Satanic Verses and the Ayatollah's Licence to Kill, in: Eveline G. BOUWERS / David NASH (eds.), Demystifying the Sacred. Blasphemy and Violence from the French Revolution to Today, Munich 2022, pp. 247–276, URL: <<https://doi.org/10.1515/9783110713091-012>> (07-19-2023).

secularism. Many academic observers reflected upon the instrumentalization of religious values and the construction of sacred warfare and its history<sup>11</sup>. The phenomenon of suicide bombing has been subjected to scholarly analysis using key terms of Durkheimian sociology – ritual, gift, and sacrifice – to argue that these killings were not merely disruptive for the societies under attack but can be understood as sacrificial rituals, offerings to the (imagined) community of believers to oblige them to continue the struggle<sup>12</sup>.

Montreal, December 2022. The final text of the Kunming-Montreal Global Biodiversity Framework envisioned as one of its key targets,

that by 2030 at least 30 percent of terrestrial, inland water, and of coastal and marine areas [...] are effectively conserved and managed through ecologically representative, well-connected and equitably governed systems of protected areas and other effective area-based conservation measures<sup>13</sup>.

If put into practice within the next few years, this ambitious target of »thirty by thirty« entails a heretofore unknown extension of protected areas. As »wild nature« set apart, and territorializations of »ecosystem integrity«, protected areas can in many ways be regarded as the sacred spaces of the global environmental movement<sup>14</sup>. Environmentalism, indeed, has always been rife with the terminologies, rituals, and practices of the sacred. Arguably, images and discourses of nature's sacredness have accompanied the rise of nature conservation and environmentalism in Euro-American societies from their origins in 19th century Romanticism and the rise of the natural sciences. Historian Bron Taylor has provocatively described the growth of this movement as the emergence of a »dark green religion«, the formation of a global nature religion based upon attitudes that regard the natural world and its biotic and abiotic

11 Klaus SCHREINER (ed.), *Heilige Kriege. Religiöse Begründungen militärischer Gewaltanwendung: Judentum, Christentum und Islam im Vergleich*, München 2009; Volkhard KRECH, *Opfer und Heiliger Krieg: Gewalt aus religionswissenschaftlicher Sicht*, in: Wilhelm HEITMEYER/John HAGAN (eds.), *Internationales Handbuch der Gewaltforschung*, Wiesbaden 2002, pp. 1255–1275, URL: <[https://doi.org/10.1007/978-3-322-80376-4\\_51](https://doi.org/10.1007/978-3-322-80376-4_51)> (07-19-2023).

12 See Ivan STRENSKI, *Sacrifice, Gift and the Social Logic of Muslim »Human Bombers«*, in: *Terrorism and Political Violence* 15/3 (2004), pp. 1–34; cf. Talal ASAD, *On Suicide Bombing*, New York 2007, and Lorenz GRAITL, *Terror as Sacrificial Ritual? A Discussion of (Neo-)Durkheimian Approaches to Suicide Bombing*, in: James R. LEWIS (ed.), *The Cambridge Companion to Religion and Terrorism*, Cambridge 2017, pp. 116–131.

13 For the final text see COP15: *Final text of Kunming-Montreal Global Biodiversity Framework*, published by Convention on Biological Diversity, URL: <<https://www.cbd.int/article/cop15-final-text-kunming-montreal-gbf-221222>> (07-16-2023).

14 See Lynn ROSS-BRYANT, *Pilgrimage to the National Parks. Religion and Nature in the United States*, New York 2012; J. Donald HUGHES/Jim SWAN, *How much of the Earth is Sacred Space?*, in: *Environmental Review* 10/4 (1986), pp. 247–259.

components as sacred, imbued with intrinsic value, and therefore worthy of reverend care<sup>15</sup>. Often, such attitudes are associated with an understanding of the biosphere as a lively super-organism and a sentiment of connectedness among all living beings. One of the remarkable features of dark green religion is its compatibility with, if not origin in scientific worldviews: Indeed, new insights from the natural sciences often spawn and foster attitudes of reverend care. Taylor focuses on the United States and Western societies, with only an occasional glance on so-called indigenous nature sacralities and the powerful allure they exerted on Western environmentalism since the 1970s. Still, his heuristic reveals an abundance of nature sacralizations, particularly as a consequence of the globalization of Western style-environmentalism and the planetarization of environmental sensibilities. Indeed, we have become accustomed to the ubiquity, e. g., of »Blue Planet« photographs from space as icons of planetary spiritualities. Such images are the visual complement of the epistemic catchword *Gaia*, the Earth Goddess/super-organism that, after decades of hypothetic teetering between esotericism and science, has been elevated to academic prominence as a key term in French philosopher Bruno Latour's latest writings on the climate emergency<sup>16</sup>. The proliferation of *Gaia* is but one example for how omnipresent ideas, imaginaries and languages of the sacred are in current environmental and climate discourse. Apart from normative appeals to individual or collective behaviour, some societies have started to sacralize nature in more robust forms by elevating some of its features, like rivers or mountains, or even »Mother Earth«, as in the constitutions of Bolivia or Ecuador, to bearers of legal rights.

These examples from the fields of religion, culture, politics, and the environment could easily be extended – just think of the thousands of sacred objects that have been displaced during centuries of European colonialism and whose restitution as African cultural heritage has been such a controversial issue over the last decade<sup>17</sup>. Our introductory examples not only illustrate the multiplicity of current contestations over sacralized ideas, objects, and values but also confirm a century-old insight in the academic study of

15 Bron TAYLOR, *Dark Green Religion. Nature Spirituality and Planetary Future*, Berkeley et al. 2010, p. ix and ch. 1; cf. Kai FUNKSCHMIDT, *Naturspiritualität/Ökologismus*, in: *Zeitschrift für Religion und Weltanschauung* 3 (2022), pp. 213–222.

16 Kocku von STRUCKRAD, *Ökologische Bewegungen, naturwissenschaftliche Erzählungen und die Sakralisierung der Erde*, in: Id. (ed.), *Die Seele im 20. Jahrhundert: Eine Kulturgeschichte*, Paderborn 2019, pp. 201–232; Anne PRIMAVESI, *Sacred Gaia. Holistic theology and earth system science*, London/New York 2000; Bruno LATOUR, *Facing Gaia. Eight lectures on the new climatic regime*, Cambridge 2017.

17 See e. g., Anna BOTTESI, *Are Museums Allowed to Keep a Secret? Secret and Sacred Objects at the Weltmuseum Wien*, in: *Museum Worlds: Advances in Research* 9 (2021), pp. 53–67, at pp. 55–57. For the breadth of the debate, see François MAIRESSE (ed.), *Museum and the Sacred*, Paris 2018.

the sacred first espoused by French sociologist Émile Durkheim: Virtually anything can become sacred. Indeed, the media of the sacred are as varied as persons, material objects, ideas and ideologies, or phenomena as opaque as »Nature«, oscillating as it does between a normative idea and concrete manifestations of the biotic or abiotic environment. None of the examples represents a recent development. All have deep histories, entangling European and non-European societies in complex and often reciprocal ways. This is as true for Christian Sainthood (which includes, e. g., the phenomenon of Black Saints that have only recently come into scholarly purview)<sup>18</sup> as it is for the exertion of excessive violence in the name of the sacred, as it is for the acquisition of sacred objects in five centuries of European overseas colonialism, or the sacralization of nature, arguably the most ancient medium to be sacralized by human societies.

Given this historical depth, these conjunctures of the sacred are hard to square with two of the most prominent master narratives provided by sociologists over the last two decades. One is German philosopher's Jürgen Habermas observation that European societies of the present are best understood as »postsecular«<sup>19</sup>; the other Charles Taylor's opposing interpretation arguing that the very societies have allegedly entered a »secular age«<sup>20</sup>. Undoubtedly, there exists convincing evidence for both diagnoses, although they trigger different, yet complementary grand narratives of European Modernity: the »return of religion« on the one hand, »secularization« on the other<sup>21</sup>. Our introductory examples, however, neither support the assumption that the »postsecular« was merely a recent development, nor that the social imaginary of European societies has become as thoroughly immanent as Taylor would have it, nor as secular as many twentieth-century social theorists believed. The problem with these assessments is not that they get the timing wrong. Already half a century ago in 1977, sociologists like Daniel Bell found good reason to argue for a »return of the sacred«, partially out of some kind of spiritual yearning, partially because he realized that secularization had not been accompanied by a »necessary, determinate shrinkage in the character

18 Erin ROWE, *Black Saints in early modern global Catholicism*, Cambridge 2019.

19 Jürgen HABERMAS, *Notes on Post-Secular Society*, in: *New Perspectives Quarterly* 25/4 (2008), pp. 17–29.

20 Charles TAYLOR, *A Secular Age*, Cambridge, MA 2007.

21 Albrecht KOSCHORKE, »Säkularisierung« und »Wiederkehr der Religion«. Zu zwei Narrativen der europäischen Moderne, in: Ulrich WILLEMS et al. (eds.), *Moderne und Religion. Kontroversen um Modernität und Säkularisierung*, Bielefeld 2013, pp. 237–260; cf. Irene DINGEL/Christiane TIETZ (eds.), *Säkularisierung und Religion. Europäische Wechselwirkungen*, Göttingen 2019, URL: <<https://doi.org/10.13109/9783666570933>> (07-19-2023).



and extent of beliefs«<sup>22</sup>. Rather, the problem is that these assessments claim the return of something that, in the case of the sacred, has never left. This is so because at least part of secularization theory unhelpfully conflated secularization with disenchantment, and the religious with the sacred.

The problem with the conflation of religion and the sacred in much of secularization theory is that it pits »the sacred« against the secular<sup>23</sup>, as a somehow inferior opponent in the face of the rationalizing forces of modernity, with retreat as its default mode despite occasional returns. This is a false opposition, for it arrests the sacred in the religious realm and impedes to think it in the plural and together with the secular<sup>24</sup>. Locating the sacred merely on one side of the religious / secular divide also tends to organize the deeply held values and convictions of actors in both fields along a non-rational / rational divide. As a consequence, the historical force of sacralizations as a cultural practice beyond the purview of institutionalized religion is underestimated<sup>25</sup>, or understood merely as expressions of »invisible religion«<sup>26</sup>.

This volume adopts a historical and constructivist understanding of sacralizations as a tool to analyse what societies, social groups, or individuals regarded as non-negotiable, absolute, intangible, and ultimately meaningful, therefore entitled to exert normative claims upon the social behaviour of self and others. The contributions assembled here understand sacralizations as discursive and non-discursive historical practices of attribution through which collectives negotiated ultimate values and ideals, respectively the boundaries between immanence and transcendence, within and beyond religion. The chapters that follow provide case studies from disciplines as varied as history, theology, cultural geography, philosophy, musicology, and the environmental

22 Daniel BELL, *The Return of the Sacred: The Argument about the Future of Religion*, in: *Bulletin of the American Academy of Arts and Sciences* 31/6 (1978), pp. 29–55, at p. 31.

23 For a vindication of an antagonistic relationship between secularization and sacralization, see N. J. DEMERATH III, *Secularization and Sacralization Deconstructed and Reconstructed*, in: James A. BECKFORD / id. (eds.), *The SAGE Handbook of the Sociology of Religion*, London 2007, pp. 57–80.

24 For an early sociological critique, see Philipp E. HAMMOND (ed.), *The Sacred in a Secular Age. Towards Revision in the Scientific Study of Religion*, Berkeley 1985.

25 For a substantial elaboration of this critique, tackling Weber's notion of disenchantment, see Hans JOAS, *The Power of the Sacred. An Alternative to the Narrative of Disenchantment*, Oxford 2021; Matthias KOENIG, *Hans Joas' Theorie der Sakralisierung und die Revision der Säkularisierungstheorie*, in: Magnus SCHLETTE et al. (eds.), *Idealbildung, Sakralisierung, Religion. Beiträge zu Hans Joas' *Die Macht des Heiligen**, Frankfurt / New York 2022, pp. 187–202. See also Thomas SCHWINN, *Die »Macht des Heiligen« als eine Alternative zur Entzauberung? Zu Hans Joas' Religionstheorie*, in: *Berliner Journal für Soziologie* 29 (2019), pp. 127–149, URL: <<https://doi.org/10.1007/s11609-019-00389-z>> (07-19-2023).

26 Thomas LUCKMANN, *Die unsichtbare Religion*, Frankfurt a. M. 1991.

humanities across five centuries of early modern and modern European History in the wider world. The analyses assembled here probe the interdisciplinary potential and the pitfalls of a constructivist notion of the sacred for understanding the past. Being exemplary rather than comprehensive, they are neither intended as a further nail in the coffin of secularization theory, nor do we seek to counter secularization narratives with an alternative, evolutionary typology of transformations of the sacred<sup>27</sup>. The contributions are interested in religious figurations of the sacred, examine its changing medialities, and look for conjunctures and new urgencies of the sacred in historic relations between humans and nature.

Analysing attributions of sacrality emerging within both religious and non-religious contexts, this volume exposes at least three fundamental paradoxes of thinking and writing about the sacred in the European past. The first paradox consists of the constant negotiation of that-which-should-not-be-negotiated. In historical perspective, it becomes evident that the respective sacred of collectives was never stable and always contested, both from within and from outside the respective social formation. Indeed, it is the very instability of the sacred that necessitates the constant re-attribution and the ritualized acknowledgment of its sacrality and significance. Second, while it may be true that the Christian churches have lost much of their following and dominant social influence, patterns, understandings, and rituals of the Christian sacred still exert a powerful influence also on secular figurations of the sacred. Therefore, socially relevant assumptions about the sacred in Europe remain shaped by the ideational infrastructure of Christianity. This said, the relationship between religious and secular conceptions of the sacred were more complex than assuming simply a transfer of elements, rituals, and figurations from institutionalized religion into other social arenas. Third, there is a paradoxical tension between difference/exclusion and connectedness/inclusion associated with the sacred. It is a principled mechanism of distinction, setting apart and elevating its object from its profane or mundane environments at the same time it integrates and exerts demands upon its constituency of adherents or believers. The latter phenomenon has been called the problematic »collective self-sacralization«<sup>28</sup> of the sacred's respective social constituencies and the contributions to this volume provide ample evidence – the nation, so-called »New Men« or nature conservationists – of moral communities held together by processes of sacralization, often at the exclusion, marginalization, if not

27 See the distinction between a primal, archaic, monotheistic, modern, and postmodern sacred proposed by Bronislaw SZERSZYŃSKI, *Nature, Technology, and the Sacred*, Oxford 2004.

28 JOAS, *The Power of the Sacred*, ch. 7.

potential erasure of other social groups, alleged non-believers or alternative sacralities. Thus, sacralization, by categorizing both its objects and constituencies, is a fundamental way of doing differences.

In what follows, we first discuss the difficulties of providing a definition of the sacred. Then we argue for disentangling secularization and sacralization in order to open up the analytical field by dissociating the sacred from its narrow understanding as the beating heart of institutionalized religion. Then we conclude our introduction with a brief survey of the contributions to this volume.

## 1. Sacralizing the Sacred: Cross-Disciplinary Reflections

This volume argues for the relevance not merely of a religious, or Christian understanding of the sacred, but of multiple sacralities across time, societies and social groups. This makes a definition of the sacred extremely difficult, particularly also because several disciplines are involved. Indeed, the sacred has such a deep intellectual, theological, historical, if not evolutionary genealogy that it is impossible to do justice to the myriads of definitions, let alone practical uses of the term<sup>29</sup>. There are at least five reasons why the sacred defies straightforward definition, and why one should think it through with care. First, the sacred as it was developed as a concept around 1900 was a product of imperial armchair sociology and thoroughly implicated in European ideologies of social evolution and white superiority that legitimized overseas colonization. This did not only introduce hierarchical understandings of the holy that placed the modern European Protestant version at the apex of religious evolution. In his contribution to this volume, Johannes Paulmann shows, amongst others, how European notions of fetishism originated in the colonial encounter of Portuguese seafarers with coastal societies in West Africa, shaping European ideas of the sacred in complex and unexpected ways. Fetishism was, however, only one of several conceptual imports crafted in the contact zones of the colonial encounter between European ethnographers – professional, military, missionary, administrative or otherwise – and indigenous societies in the global South. *Taboo*, *totem*, or *mana* were other influential concepts that shaped the thinking of early twentieth-century scholars about

29 For surveys, see Arie L. MOLENDIJK, The Notion of the Sacred, in: Paul POST / id. (eds.), *Holy Ground. Re-inventing Ritual Space in Modern Western Culture*, Leiden 2010, pp. 55–89; Matthew T. EVANS, The Sacred: Differentiating, Clarifying and Extending Concepts, in: *Review of Religious Research* 45/1 (2003), pp. 32–47; Günter LANCZKOWSKI et al., Art. Heiligkeit, in: *Theologische Realenzyklopädie* 14 (1986), pp. 695–712.

the sacred as the orienting core of religion<sup>30</sup>. Thus, the power of the sacred not only weighed in on part of the colonizers – as the sacralization of whiteness, or in the missionary expansion of the Christian sacred – but it was adapted and modified in the colonial encounter<sup>31</sup>, and the sacralities of the colonized Other exerted noticeable impacts on European thinking. While not at the centre of the contributions of this volume, the post- and decolonial problematization of European notions of the sacred remains an urgent intellectual project.

A second reason why a definition of the sacred is complex is that the sacred has often been defined as exactly that: undefinable. Perhaps no individual scholar did more to popularize this understanding of the sacred than Rudolf Otto, a German Protestant theologian whose book *Das Heilige* (1917), translated into English as *The Idea of the Holy* in 1923, promoted it as a category »entirely *sui generis*« and therefore ineffable and »non-definable in a strict sense«<sup>32</sup>. As something that cannot be named or defined, Otto located the Holy as ontological realness in the supernatural realm outside history and culture, »induced, incited, and aroused« through the experience of »divinatory natures«<sup>33</sup>. In order to make understandable what cannot be understood, Otto invented a number of neologisms, like the sacred as the »radically other« (*totaliter aliter*), *mysterium tremendum*, or the Numinous (*das Numinose*). While the scholarly reception of Otto's research has been partially vilifying, his terminology has remained as current in academic discourse as the linguistic grappling with the ineffable through superlatives or tautologies like the »really real«. The diffusion of his idea of the Holy is itself a fascinating aspect of the 20th century intellectual history of the sacred. When, for example, influential American Indian theologian and activist Vine Deloria Jr. admits

30 Volkhard KRECH, Beobachtungen zu Sakralisierungsprozessen in der Moderne – mit einem Seitenblick auf Kunstreligion, in: Hermann DEUSER et al. (eds.), *Metamorphosen des Heiligen. Struktur und Dynamik von Sakralisierung am Beispiel der Kunstreligion*, Tübingen 2015, pp. 411–425, at pp. 417–420; Alexandra PRZYREMBEL, *Verbote und Geheimnisse. Das Tabu und die Genese der europäischen Moderne*, Frankfurt/New York 2011; Nicolas MEYLAN, *Mana. A History of a Western Category*, Leiden 2017.

31 See e.g., Alison BENNETT, Objects of Catholic Conversion in Colonial Buganda: A Study of the Miraculous Medal, in: *Journal of Religion in Africa* 51/1 (2022), pp. 27–64, URL: <<https://doi.org/10.1163/15700666-12340197>> (07-19-2023).

32 Rudolf OTTO, *Das Heilige: Über das Irrationale in der Idee des Göttlichen und sein Verhältnis zum Rationalen*, Breslau 1917; id., *The Idea of the Holy. An Inquiry into the Non-Rational Factor in the Idea of the Divine and Its Relation to the Rational*, London 1923.

33 For detailed discussions, see Robert A. ORSI, The Problem of the Holy, in: Id. (ed.), *The Cambridge Companion to Religious Studies*, Cambridge 2011, pp. 84–105, at p. 94, URL: <<https://doi.org/10.1017/CCOL9780521883917.006>> (07-19-2023); and Hans JOAS, Säkulare Heiligkeit: Wie aktuell ist Rudolf Otto?, in: Jörg LAUSTER et al. (eds.), *Rudolf Otto: Theologie – Religionsphilosophie – Religionsgeschichte*, Berlin/Boston 2014, pp. 59–78, URL: <<https://doi.org/10.1515/9783110310962.59>> (07-19-2023).

that Otto and his terminology have been »seminal in all [his] thinking« of American Indian and indigenous spiritualities<sup>34</sup>, one is left to wonder how much conceptual Christianity informed his previous popularization of »original« American Indian spiritualities during the 1970s. Also German sociologist Hans Joas' much-received *Power of the Sacred* draws upon a notion of »self-transcendence« as the »genesis of sacredness«, that is conceived of as transhistorical, exclusive, anthropologically universal, and transcendentally open as Otto's sacred<sup>35</sup>. The fundamental methodological challenge of this intellectual tradition is the transcendent sacred as *experience*: How does a constructivist approach deal with the fact that people do claim the reality of encounters with the wonderful and sacred? And how do we take seriously such experience analytically, as a construct accessible merely through its social communication<sup>36</sup>?

Third, defining the sacred is complicated because of its plurality. This is another intellectual heritage of the controversies among theologians, ethnologists, sociologists, and psychologists in the first decades of the 20th century. These debates not only produced ontological notions of the sacred but also the idea of the sacred as a social practice. In 1912, French sociologist Émile Durkheim laid the foundations for the sociological study of the sacred in his *Elementary Forms of Religious Life*, in which he argued »for an understanding of religions as systems of social structures and practices relative to »sacred things«<sup>37</sup>. Durkheim claimed, in a famous passage in his book, that »a rock, a tree, a spring, a pebble, a piece of wood, a house, in a word, anything can

34 See Vine DELORIA JR., *The Sacred in the Modern World*, in: Bron R. TAYLOR (ed.), *The Encyclopedia of Religion and Nature*, vol. 2, London / New York 2005, pp. 1446–1448.

35 JOAS, *Power of the Sacred*; id., *Sacralization and Desacralization: Political Domination and Religious Interpretation*, in: *Journal of the Society of Christian Ethics* 36/2 (2016), pp. 25–42, at p. 28. Cf. Stephan MOEBIUS, *Sociology of the Sacred: The Revitalization of the Durkheim School at the Collège de Sociologie and the Renewal of a Sociology of Sacralization* by Hans Joas, in: Hans JOAS / Andreas PETTENKOFER (eds.), *The Oxford Handbook of Émile Durkheim*, Oxford 2020, URL: <<https://doi.org/10.1093/oxfordhb/9780190679354.013.25>> (07-19-2023).

36 Ann TAVES, *Religious Experience Reconsidered*, Princeton 2009; ORSI, *Problem of the Holy*; Volkhard KRECH, *Die Evolution der Religion. Ein soziologischer Grundriss*, Bielefeld 2021, pp. 99–103.

37 Gordon LYNCH, *Sacred*, in: Adam POSSAMAI / Anthony J. BLASI (eds.), *The SAGE Encyclopedia of the Sociology of Religion*, Thousand Oaks 2020, pp. 716–718, URL: <<http://dx.doi.org/10.4135/9781529714401.n403>> (07-19-2023). For analyses of Durkheim's sociology of the sacred, its elaboration within the Durkheim School and the Collège de Sociologie of the late 1930s, see Stephan MOEBIUS, *Die Zauberverehrungen. Soziologiegeschichte des Collège de Sociologie (1937–1939)*, Konstanz 2006; Alexander Tristan RILEY, *Godless intellectuals? The Intellectual Pursuit of the Sacred Reinvented*, Oxford / New York 2010; Camille TAROT, *De Durkheim a Mauss: L'invention du symbolique, sociologie et science des religions*, Paris 1999.

be sacred<sup>38</sup>. Much of Durkheim's argument in the *Elementary Forms* was based upon ethnographies of allegedly »primitive societies« encountered in the context of European colonial rule<sup>39</sup>. The marked emphasis he put on »sacred things« can be read as a reflection of the thousands of sacred objects that were looted and acquired on colonial expeditions to fill the basements and showrooms of the ethnographic museums of Empire<sup>40</sup>. Therefore, it is not exaggerated to argue that the colonial pluralization of sacralities constituted the epistemic challenge to come to terms with the sacred as a social practice<sup>41</sup>. For Durkheim, it was not the quality of the object (as he conceived of the sacred predominantly in material terms as »sacred things«) but their importance in social life that motivated, if not necessitated their setting apart. In the words of neo-Durkheimian sociologist Gordon Lynch, he »situated this understanding of the sacred in systems of social practice, in which groups undertook ritual activities in relation to symbolic representations of sacred objects through which they were bound into a shared sense of identity and moral order«<sup>42</sup>. This notion complicates definition for virtually anything can become sacred, as long as it can be meaningfully set apart, and regarded as different and important enough for social groups to relate to it.

The fourth complication of any definition of the sacred results from what has just been described: As a concept and a social fact, the sacred has been subject to more than a century of scholarly reflection, in religious as well as in scholarly contexts, and in disciplines as different as theology and comparative

38 Émile DURKHEIM, *The Elementary Forms of the Religious Life*, transl. by Joseph Ward SWAIN, Introduction by Robert NISBERT, London <sup>2</sup>1976, p. 37.

39 See e. g., William Watts MILLER, Durkheim's re-imagination of Australia: a case study of the relations between theory and »facts«, in: *L'Année Sociologique* 62/2 (2012), pp. 329–349; Felicity JENSZ, Reporting from the Religious Contact Zone. Missionaries and Anthropologists in Nineteenth-Century Australia, in: Judith BECKER (ed.), *European Missions in Contact Zones. Transformation through Interaction in a (Post)Colonial World*, Göttingen 2015, pp. 125–141, URL: <<https://doi.org/10.13109/9783666101410.125>> (07-19-2023); Fuyuki KURASAWA, The Durkheimian School and Colonialism. Exploring the Constitutive Paradox, in: George STEINMETZ (ed.), *Sociology and Empire: The Imperial Entanglements of a Discipline*, New York 2013, pp. 188–210, URL: <<https://doi.org/10.1515/9780822395409-007>> (07-19-2023).

40 See e. g., Sarah LONGAIR, The many transitions of the Mwinzi Mkuu's *ngoma* and *siwa* in colonial Zanzibar (unpubl. conference paper IEG Mainz November 2021); ead., Recovering and Reframing the Regalia of the Mwinzi Mkuu in British Colonial Zanzibar, in: *Museum History Journal* 3/2 (2010), pp. 149–170.

41 Andreas Pettenkofer provided a thorough postcolonial reading of Durkheim's sociology, including the *Elementary Forms*, in his paper presented at the IEG-conference in November 2021. For a postcolonial critique of Durkheim in general, see Gurinder K. BHAMBRA/John HOLMWOOD, *Colonialism and Modern Social Theory*, Cambridge 2021, pp. 141–176; George STEINMETZ (ed.), *Sociology and Empire: The Imperial Entanglements of a Discipline*, New York 2013.

42 LYNCH, *Sacred*, pp. 716–718.

religious studies, ethnology, or psychology. This heterogeneous genesis<sup>43</sup> of the sacred and the multidisciplinary attempts at its scholarly reflection must themselves be seen as a defining characteristic of sacralizations in European history. They are sacralizations of the sacred in the sense of its social and intellectual construction and fabrication. As such, they did not merely have relevance in the realm of scholarly discussion, influencing a century of analyses of what the sacred allegedly is. Academic conceptions of the sacred were received beyond academia, too. Moreover, these conceptions themselves digested and processed a wealth of empirical observations and practices, all of which must be taken into account when analysing sacralizations as a historical phenomenon.

Finally, from a cultural studies perspective, it is less interesting what the sacred *is* but how it has been fabricated, used, and mobilized. What political, religious or scholarly agendas has it served, what conflicts and categorizations has it engendered, and what social and cultural work has the concept done – in short, how has the sacred been sacralized? While it is impossible to provide a single definition of the sacred that does justice to the plurality and diversity of its historical figurations, we suggest a heuristic that is social constructivist in approach but allows to integrate essentialist or ontological notions of the sacred, too. The latter can be understood as a particularly powerful, personal, and exclusive form of attributing sacredness, in which the agency of the encounter is shifted almost entirely towards the sacralizing Other. Yet, as all other social attributions of sacredness, also self-transcendent experiences must be communicated to attain social relevance, which means that they, too, are discursively and culturally shaped. Thus, the following chapters apply, for the most part, an understanding of sacralization as the repeated attribution of sacredness, i.e., the historical acts and practices with which collectives, through discursive and non-discursive means, negotiated the boundaries between immanence and transcendence and rendered spaces, objects, persons, actions, times or ideas non-negotiable, »absolute, non-contingent realities which present normative claims over the meanings and conduct of social life«<sup>44</sup>.

## 2. Disentangling Secularization and Sacralization

The survey of the sacred's genesis as a scholarly concept has shown how closely the idea has been attached to religion, despite Durkheim's half-hearted attempt to understand sacralization as essentially a social practice. However,

43 Cf. Carsten COLPE (ed.), *Die Diskussion um das »Heilige«*, Darmstadt 1977, p. 27.

44 Gordon LYNCH, *The Sacred in the Modern World. A Cultural Sociological Approach*, New York 2012, p. 29.

as long as we understand the sacred as the defining core of religion, sacralization will remain a defensive, somehow backward, and irrational phenomenon, at least if seen through the lens of the established paradigm of secularization. Within this dominant paradigm, the sacred is something destined to disappear despite occasional returns. It is not a fundamental social operation that produces »core, unchallengeable moral meanings with which social groups periodically engage in immersive ritualised acts«<sup>45</sup>.

Therefore, sociologists Kim Knott and Matthew Francis have suggested to disentangle the religious and the sacred to show »how the sacred as a concept can signal deeply held values on both sides of the religious/secular distinction«<sup>46</sup>. In their wake, philosopher Magnus Schlette and sociologist of religion Volkhard Krech<sup>47</sup> have elaborated in more detail upon the distinction between religious and non-religious spheres to discuss sacralizations within and across the religious-secular divide. Instead of pitting (re-)sacralization against secularization, as has often been done in the sociological debate over the limits of secularization theory, an analytical approach sensitive to sacralizations (with and without its potential prefixes) within and across the spheres of the religious and the secular sidesteps a number of unspoken assumptions in the secularization debate. Among these are the notion of an almost total monopoly for the sacred by institutionalized religions at the beginning of the early modern period, a quasi-natural competence for defining and managing, if not ownership of the sacred by established religions, particularly the Christian Churches, or the assumption of a steady retreat of religious understandings of the sacred during late modernity, just to make a surprising postsecular reappearance after the year 2000.

An analytical distinction between the spheres of the religious and secular is not to be equated with a claim that these spheres have always been level, equally sizeable, separate or even contemporaneous – take, e.g., the powerful allure of Greek and Roman sacralities upon Enlightenment thinkers, conceptions of *Kunstreligion*, or French revolutionaries. Obviously, the religious and the secular have historically variable contours, edges, and overlap, which must

45 LYNCH, Sacred, p. 718.

46 Matthew FRANCIS/Kim KNOTT, »Return? It never left«. Exploring the »Sacred« as a Resource bridging the Gap between the Religious and the Secular, in: Christopher KUTZ et al. (eds.), Religious Norms in the Public Sphere, Florence 2015, pp. 44–48; Kim KNOTT, The Secular Sacred: In-between or both/and?, in: Abby DAY et al. (eds.), Social Identities Between the Sacred and the Secular, Farnham 2013, pp. 145–160. Cf. Jürgen STRAUB, Die Macht des Heiligen. Sachliche Streitpunkte, soziale Suprematie und die praktische Funktion von theoretischen Brückenkonzepten, in: Magnus SCHLETTE et al. (eds.), Idealbildung, Sakralisierung, Religion. Beiträge zu Hans Joas' Die Macht des Heiligen, Frankfurt/New York 2022, pp. 109–184.

47 Magnus SCHLETTE/Volkhard KRECH, Sakralisierung, in: Detlef POLLACK et al. (eds.), Handbuch Religionssoziologie, Wiesbaden 2018, pp. 437–463.



be conceived of with respect to the concrete historical constellation under analysis. We are well aware that the »secular« as a separate sphere of thinking and action makes sense only with the manifest rise of »secularism« over the 19th and 20th centuries<sup>48</sup>, while it runs the risk of distorting historical realities when the existence of such a sphere is claimed for earlier centuries<sup>49</sup>. What is important is not the form or label of this sphere but the possibility to think the sacred otherwise. If the observation is adequate that the sacred precedes religion, respectively that a religious framing and communication is only one way of articulating self-transcending experiences and existential, ultimate values<sup>50</sup>, then we must allow for beliefs beyond belief and a non-religious sphere, whatever its concrete geographical, social, cultural, philosophical, or political form.

Bearing this in mind, a principled distinction opens up the possibility of identifying sacralizations beyond what we usually identify as religion. Only such an analytical distinction makes it possible to analyse, e.g., the sacreds of self-identifying secularists, the sacralizations accompanying a decidedly secular enterprise such as the natural sciences, or the secular pieties and ultimate values that define a place like Auschwitz-Birkenau<sup>51</sup>. It allows to take a fresh look at all those phenomena, developments and movements qualified as deviant, aberrant, pagan, wrong faiths, sects, cults, superstition, or mere world-views in the long history of defending and defining the allegedly »true« faith and understanding of the sacred by adherents of Christianity. Moreover, the analytical distinction between the religious and secular, however hard to disentangle often in practice, allows to describe the relationship between the two not merely as antagonistic, as the long culture wars of the 19th and 20th centuries suggest. Instead, ongoing cross-fertilizations become visible, including those across time and space. Phenomena like the »transfert de sacralité«, first identified by Mona Ozouf in the making of the French revolutionary cult of

48 See Christiane FREY et al. (eds.), *Säkularisierung. Grundlagentexte zur Theoriegeschichte*, Berlin 2020; Marian BURCHARDT / Monika WOHLRAB-SAHR, »Multiple Secularities: Religion and Modernity in the Global Age« – Introduction, in: *International Sociology* 28/6 (2013), pp. 605–611, URL: <<https://doi.org/10.1177/0268580913510540>> (07-17-2023).

49 Peter BEYER, *Questioning the Secular / Religious Divide in a Post-Westphalian World*, in: *Ibid.*, pp. 663–679, URL: <<https://doi.org/10.1177/0268580913507070>> (07-17-2023).

50 JOAS, *Power of the Sacred*, ch. 7; Hans Peter DUERR, *Diesseits von Eden. Über den Ursprung der Religion*, Berlin 2020, pp. 25–33.

51 See Michael STAUSBERG, *Auschwitz and the Meta-Topography of the Sacred*, in: *Saeculum* 71/2 (2021), pp. 319–340; Zoë WAXMAN, *Testimonies as Sacred Texts: The Sanctification of Holocaust Writing*, in: *Past & Present* 206, Supplement 5 (2010), pp. 321–341; Jack KUGELMASS, *Why We Go to Poland: Holocaust Tourism as a Secular Ritual*, in: James YOUNG (ed.), *The Art of Memory: Holocaust Memorials in History*, New York 1994, pp. 175–183.

the 1790s and later suggested as a more general model, can be contextualized, refined and put into broader perspective<sup>52</sup>. Neither have such adoptions and appropriations worked only one way, nor were they a one-time event. They were also not necessarily intentional »transfers«, nor, as Ozouf has shown, was the Christian sacred the only cultural model available for bricolage or imitation. The analysis of sacralizations within and across the religious and the secular, as historically malleable process rather than transfer – helps to reveal how the Christian sacred was itself a result of multiple borrowings and incorporations. At times, the language, symbols, and elements of the religious sacred were consciously appropriated by social actors identifying as non-religious; at other times, this happened unconsciously, and often, the forms, practices, rituals of the religious sacred serve as subconscious moral patterns that provide fertile ground for the emergence of »infrasecular« reconfigurations or geographies<sup>53</sup>.

It follows from this argument that the distinction between the religious and secular spheres does not correspond with the dichotomy of the sacred and the profane. Rather, the conceptual alignment<sup>54</sup> of the sacred as the core of organized religion is a heritage of early twentieth-century phenomenologists of religion like Söderblom or Otto, who themselves perceived Christianity threatened by secularist worldviews and countered this challenge through a universalization of religion. Lynch's cultural sociological approach dissolves the stark dichotomy of sacred and profane by adding the mundane as a third mode of existence, drawing attention to a state of indifference that is simply not affected by the antagonistic mutuality of the sacred and profane. In his contribution to this volume, Johannes Paulmann cautions against the sacred/profane-dichotomy as a tool for historical analysis, for this dichotomy, if employed in a totalizing and antagonistic sense, imports the normatively charged dichotomous worldview of believers into the conceptual toolbox of analysis. The dichotomous understanding of the sacred and profane as an exclusive either-or dichotomy was already foregrounded by Durkheim, who portrayed them »as two worlds between which there is nothing in common«<sup>54</sup>, always in danger to lapse into a »veritable antagonism« between »hostile and jealous rivals«<sup>55</sup>.

52 Mona OZOUF, *Festivals and the French Revolution*, Cambridge/London 1988, pp. 262–282. On the necessity of further theorization see Friedrich Wilhelm GRAF, *Art. Sakraltransfer*, in: *Religion in Geschichte und Gegenwart*, vol. 7, ed. by Hans Dieter BETZ et al., Tübingen 42004, p. 748f.

53 Veronica DELLA DORA, *Infrasecular geographies: Making, unmaking and remaking sacred space*, in: *Progress in Human Geography* 42/1 (2018), pp. 44–71.

54 DURKHEIM, *The Elementary Forms*, p. 38f.

55 *Ibid.*, p. 39.

Religious phenomenologists like Otto or Mircea Eliade regarded the sacred as the defining element of *homo religious* and radicalized the antagonism further. In Eliade's view the sacred and the profane represented two existential, contrasting and mutually exclusive ways of being-in-the-world (which included the partial restoration of the dignity of the primitive). Rather than using them as analytical categories, Eliade mobilized the sacred / profane to vindicate and sacralize the religious sacred in the face of its secularist profanation<sup>56</sup>.

Is the sacred / profane-dichotomy therefore »insufficient« for historical analysis<sup>57</sup>, because it has been radicalized in historical contestations over ultimate truth claims? Etymologically, the *profanum* as the precinct before the temple was a necessary and logical by-product of the boundary work to set apart the sacred, the outside of demarcation. While there is a logical necessity for the profane, there is no such logic in understanding sacred and profane as totalizing entities in permanent and antagonistic interaction. Perhaps exactly a reflexive, constructivist and historical perspective on how the dichotomy has been employed in the past is able to reveal what cultural work both terms were supposed to do, and in which situations they were radicalized into monolithic, existential and antagonistic worldviews by historically situated actors. And such a reflexive, constructivist and historically sensitive approach to the phenomenon can continue to utilize both categories, in the knowledge that also our analyses are doing boundary work on how the sacred ought to be understood a century after the religious phenomenologists.

### 3. Multiplying the Sacred: The contributions

The individual chapters of this volume present case studies of sacralizations emerging in both religious and non-religious contexts, from the Early Modern period up to the history of the present. They are arranged in four sections which are to be understood as thematic accents and emphases rather than mutually exclusive categories.

#### 3.1 Religious Figurations of the Sacred

A first section assembles two contributions studying religious figurations of the sacred within early modern transatlantic Protestantism, plus a study on canonization as a key sacralizing practice in 19th century Jewish reform in Italy. Researchers have often emphasized that the world was desacralized

<sup>56</sup> Mircea ELIADE, *The Sacred and the Profane. The Nature of Religion*, New York 1959.

<sup>57</sup> See Johannes Paulmann's contribution to this volume.

during the Reformation Period<sup>58</sup>: the Reformers focused on the word as the sole divine revelation (*sola scriptura*). This reevaluation of the word was accompanied by a devaluation of certain objects that had been considered sacred in the Middle Ages because salvation had been conveyed to the world through them<sup>59</sup>. The thesis is based on the dictum of Max Weber, who assumed in 1913 a »disenchantment of the world« for the 16th century. In the course of the Reformation, the boundaries between the sacred and the profane had shifted<sup>60</sup>. In the meantime, this interpretation of the Reformation is often doubted or modified<sup>61</sup>. Especially works on the material culture of the Reformation period argued for a new view on the questions of materiality and holiness/sacredness in the Reformation period<sup>62</sup>. Alexandra Walsham argues for speaking about »cycles of religious changes« instead of »secularisation«<sup>63</sup>.

**Erin Lambert** builds on this research. Her object of study is writings by German and Austrian Anabaptists from the early Reformation period<sup>64</sup>. The Anabaptists perceived the tension existing in the Reformation period between matter and text as forms of divine revelation in the world, as well as the tension between seeing and reading as forms of spiritual edification. In their writings, therefore, they emphasized the immanence of the divine precisely within creation as matter. They interpreted creation as a form of writing in which God revealed himself. The Anabaptists demonstrated an awareness of the limitations of the Word as the only means of divine revelation. From their point of view, it was precisely the vision that enabled access to the divine. The world served as a material setting in which Christians could engage with the visions, because there the visible was revealed to the invisible power of God. Thus, rather than desacralizing the world, Anabaptists saw sacrality revealed precisely in the world. Lambert thus refutes the thesis of the desacralization of the world in the Reformation era through an expanded understanding of

58 Alexandra WALSHAM, *Migrations of the Holy. Explaining Religious Changes in Medieval and Early Modern Europe*, in: *Journal of Medieval and Early Modern Studies* 44 (2014), pp. 241–280.

59 Cf. TAYLOR, *A Secular Age*; Brad S. GREGORY, *The Unintended Reformation. How a Religious Revolution Secularized Society*, Cambridge, MA 2015.

60 Cf. Max WEBER, *Die protestantische Ethik und der »Geist« des Kapitalismus*, ed. by Klaus LICHTBLAU / Johannes WEISS, Wiesbaden 2016, p. 200, note 163.

61 Cf. WALSHAM, *Migrations of the Holy*, p. 247. Cf. also Bob SCRIBNER, *The Reformation, Popular Magic, and the Disenchantment of the World*, in: *Journal of Interdisciplinary History* 23/3 (1993), pp. 475–494.

62 Cf. Carline Walker BYNUM, *Christian Materiality. An Essay on Religion in Late Medieval Europe*, New York 2015.

63 Cf. WALSHAM, *Migrations of the Holy*, p. 264f.

64 Cf. *Ibid.*, p. 256: »The relative marginalization of Anabaptism from professional scholarship is one manifestation of this displacement of varieties of belief that don't fit the monolithic categories engendered by confessionalization«.

materiality. Rather, she shows that (at least in parts of the Reformation) a sacralization of the world can be established precisely because God becomes immanent in creation.

Even in the 17th and 18th centuries, what was understood as sacred was repeatedly renegotiated in the Protestant context. Dying and death, as fundamental facts of human life, have required religious interpretation and sense-making across epochs and societies. In the early modern period, Protestant funeral writings not only offered a retrospective view of the life of the deceased but also conveyed »key norms of life and death« to the congregation. Previous research has considered printed funeral writings primarily as a genre of early modern Lutheranism. However, the genre was also established in European reformed areas<sup>65</sup>. This is where **Benedikt Brunner**'s contribution ties in: He analyses writings in the context of New England Puritanism in the late 17th and early 18th centuries, authored by Puritan preacher Cotton Mather and missionary Experience Mayhew. A key element of these writings were detailed descriptions of the lives of the deceased. By highlighting their Christian virtues and »pious ways of life«, these *Vitae* portrayed the lives of the dead as exemplary models, showing the community how an ethically good life would lead to a peaceful and blissful death. Understanding sacralization as a process in which something is performatively declared as inviolable and order-defining, Brunner analyses these exemplary lives as figurations of a »visible sainthood«. As a kind of hagiographic compilation of the religious and ethical virtues that made up normative Puritan sacrality, these exemplary lives also had a »self-sacralizing« element, serving the normative integration and stabilization of the Puritan settler community. As Brunner shows in the writings of Experience Mayhew, a missionary among the Wampanoag of Martha's Vineyard/Noepe, these normative claims were extended across the colonial divide. Converted Native Americans, too, were depicted as visible Saints after their death, intended to realign concepts of an ideal Puritan life and a harmonious colonial order willed by God. However, these models of Native American Puritan Sainthood remained contested: Reading Mayhew against the grain, Brunner demonstrates how his depictions of converts' lives testify to contestations and the persistence of Native American sacralities.

In Jewish theology of the Middle Ages and the Early Modern period, the distinction between the sacred and the profane did not play the same role as in Christian theology. This differentiation occurred only in the 18th century and became meaningful during the 19th century, when Reform-oriented Jews across Europe wanted to assimilate into European society. European

65 Cf. as an overview Benedikt BRUNNER, Die gedruckte Leichenpredigt als Erbauungsbuch. Eine Erfolgsgeschichte des 17. Jahrhunderts?, in: Medium Buch. Wolfenbütteler interdisziplinäre Forschungen 1 (2019), pp. 87–105.

non-Jewish culture came to be regarded as the »outside« and »profane« by Reform Jews, while the »inside« (Jewish life), was seen as the sacred. The »holy« was limited to the performance of specific Jewish rites. In contrast, Orthodox Judaism emphasized that God was to be worshipped everywhere, even in profane realms<sup>66</sup>. These developments of Jewish reform during the 19th century form the historical background of the canonization processes analysed by **Alessandro Grazi**, whose contribution uses Italian Jewish prayer books to highlight controversies between Orthodox and Reform Judaism. The Jewish tradition refers to a corpus of sacred texts, which in the course of time was first transmitted orally, then in writing, and gradually achieved canonical status. Understanding the »canonization« of these texts as a form of sacralization, Grazi is interested in those elements of these prayer books that were negotiable and could be changed: Some prayers were removed from the canon, new prayers were added over time; other prayers were shortened. The chapter shows how these modifications occurred through the interaction of new hierarchs who negotiated the modifications. His case study of Italian Judaism shows, however, not only how the canon of sacred scriptures was subject to negotiations but how canonization could become a vehicle of change and reform.

### 3.2 Medialities of the Sacred

Benedikt Brunner and Alessandro Grazi trace religious sacralization processes using the example of text media – funeral writings and prayer books. The chapters assembled in the second section of the volume put an even greater emphasis on the specific medialities in which the sacred was communicated and symbolized. Inga Mai Groote carefully listens to music as a medium of the transfer of sacrality, while Lucyna Przybylska deals with the cross as probably the ultimate medium of the sacred in Christianity.

Historians have often analysed the asymmetrical but mutual interference between religion and other fields of society in terms of a »transfer of sacrality«<sup>67</sup>, the adoption of religious categories, rituals and symbols in non-religious contexts. **Inga Mai Groote** tests the concept of the »transfer of sacrality« with regard to the analysis and classification of choral music from the 21st century. Using the example of contemporary compositions, she shows how musical genres, idioms, and topoi that have been characteristic for sacred

<sup>66</sup> Cf. Joseph DAN, Art. Heilig und profan VII. Judentum, in: Religion in Geschichte und Gegenwart, vol. 3, Tübingen <sup>4</sup>2000, pp. 1538f.

<sup>67</sup> Cf. for this term, OZOUF, Festivals and the French Revolution, pp. 262–282.

music for centuries are also used in the present in decidedly secular music to convey certain interpretations and create a sacred aura – independent of any particular religion.

Even a fleeting glance at the history of music makes clear that the boundaries between the sacred and secular spheres in music have been fluid, particularly since the early modern period: Elements from sacred music found their way into so-called secular music as early as the Renaissance. In the 19th century, instrumental music was sacralized as »absolute music«: It was now considered »sacred« for its own sake, no longer because of the content it conveyed or the religiously connoted texts it was underpinned with<sup>68</sup>. In the public performance of music, too, an increasing softening of the boundaries between sacred and secular spheres has been perceptible since the early modern period: Works that were originally composed for a decidedly ecclesiastical context have long since been performed not only in churches but also in concert halls.

In her contribution, Groote analyses five choral works from the 21st century: *Unicornis captivatur* by Ola Gjeilo, *Path of Miracles* by Joby Talbot, *Canticum calamitatis maritimae* by Finn Jaako Mäntyjärvi, *Ärkamine* by Erkki-Sven Tüür and *ARCHE* by Jörg Widmann. None of these compositions was understood as religiously inspired by their composers, nor were they composed for a Christian context. Nevertheless, there are textual as well as musical elements in all the works that engage with the European sacred music tradition since the Middle Ages. Even if the composers did not understand their work as religious, a »sacred aura« can be discerned in them, which is created by the inclusion of certain elements from ancient sacred music. The works analysed thus convey fundamental human narratives such as creation or redemption, but without any concrete reference to God. Traditions of ancient sacred choral music are deliberately detached from their original context and creatively used to produce new sacred contexts. In the analysed compositions, a Christian cultural heritage continues to be cultivated outside its original context and is used anew under changed conditions and with different aims. Groote's analysis shows how the choral music of the 21st century adopts a creative approach to the tradition of sacred music: The desacralizations and resacralizations of textual and musical elements create new contexts of meaning. Sacrality is produced in a new way by referring to this heritage, shaped by the European Christian musical tradition.

<sup>68</sup> Cf. for »absolute music«, Carl DAHLHAUS, *Die Idee der absoluten Musik*, Kassel et al. <sup>3</sup>1994. Rudolf Otto, too, discussed »the irrational in music«, cf. OTTO, *Das Heilige*, pp. 63–65.

The second contribution to this section analyses probably the most important and prevalent symbol of the sacred in Europe: the cross. Drawing upon a long tradition of religious sacralization in Poland<sup>69</sup>, **Lucyna Przybylska's** chapter focuses on the proliferation of crosses in post-communist Poland since 1989. Situating her approach within the geography of religion, she understands the remarkable increase of crosses in urban as well as rural contexts as a form of landscape sacralization. The cross has been well-rooted in the Polish landscape throughout the history of the country. Wayside crosses have been popular in Poland since the Counter-Reformation in the 17th century. The symbol of the cross used to be put at places meaningful for village people as well as at places where people died and were buried. Under Soviet rule, images of crosses were often removed. This desacralization was at the same time also connected with a process of sacralization: Authorities sometimes allowed the building of a parish church, so as not to be accused of breaching the Constitution, which guaranteed religious freedom. Crosses, raised in the first years after the fall of Communism, usually monumental, were built to symbolise the victory of the idea of freedom. The symbiosis of religious issues and national patriotism is also visible in the frequent use of the cross in historic monuments. Colossal crosses are also found at the hill tops around the city or on the elevations within the city. The cross is also the most often chosen marker for roadside memorials put at places of fatal car accidents, making it the distinctive feature of landscape sacralization today. Apparently, parts of Polish society feel a strong need to mark the presence of Catholicism outside the church walls and in various ordinary places: on streets and roads, on hills and in national parks, at monuments and on plaques. This rapid and widespread sacralization of the post-communist landscape can be interpreted as a way of compensating for the strictures of the bygone regime. Przybylska argues that it is an interplay of faith, politics, the rise of individualism, economy, and tradition of place (the so-called *genius loci*) as the most important factors determining the omnipresence of crosses in the contemporary cultural landscape in Poland.

69 See e. g., Damien TRICOIRE, Gottesmutter Königin von Polen. Die Sakralisierung der polnischen Monarchie im Vergleich mit Frankreich und Bayern (1630er bis 1650er Jahre), in: Agnieszka GASTOR (ed.), Maria in der Krise. Kultpraxis zwischen Konfession und Politik in Ostmitteleuropa, Köln et al. 2014, pp. 93–116.



### 3.3 Politics and Ideologies in Europe's (Culture) Wars

The next three chapters all focus on aspects of what historian Todd Weir has termed »Europe's interwar Kulturkampf«<sup>70</sup> of the 1920s and 1930s, a period of deep and often violent political and ideological polarizations in which religious worldviews and orientations played an often-neglected role. **Andrea Hofmann's** contribution to this volume shows how the First World War allowed to gloss over some of the polarizations between Church and State in Germany by enabling the Christian Churches to bestow religious meaning upon death and warfare. She examines how the death of the individual soldier in the First World War was sacralized in German protestant sermons and devotional literature with the help of biblical texts and by employing common nationalist modes of thought. The chapter analyses the strategies employed by theologians to sacralize extra-religious phenomena<sup>71</sup> like the soldier's death, or the nation. The analysis ties in with research that has shown how the nation has become a kind of religion by the 19th century at the latest: It was revered and considered an order-stabilizing element that conveyed identity and belonging. In war sermons, the profane element of the nation was inscribed in a sacred context<sup>72</sup>. Sacralizing death was intended to help people cope with a situation of extreme crisis. Theologians understood the death of a soldier on the battlefield as a sacrifice for the German fatherland in the sense of the Latin word *sacrificium*, that is, as the voluntary giving of one's own life for others<sup>73</sup>. The authors of the sermons and devotional literature were drawing on prevalent nationalist ideas and combining these with biblical and theological

70 See e.g., Todd WEIR, Introduction: Comparing Nineteenth- and Twentieth-century Culture Wars, in: *Journal of Contemporary History* 53/3 (2018), pp. 489–502; Paul HANEBRINK, European Protestants Between Anti-Communism and Anti-Totalitarianism: The Other Interwar Kulturkampf?, in: *Journal of Contemporary History* 53/3 (2018), pp. 622–643; Todd WEIR, The Christian Front against Godlessness: Anti-Secularism and the Demise of the Weimar Republic, 1928–1933, in: *Past & Present* 229 (2015), pp. 201–238.

71 Cf. SCHLETTE / KRECH, Sakralisierung, pp. 437–463.

72 Cf. Michael GEYER/Hartmut LEHMANN (eds.), *Religion und Nation – Nation und Religion. Beiträge zu einer unbewältigten Geschichte*, Göttingen 2004; Heinz-Gerhard HAUPT/Dieter LANGEWIESCHE (eds.), *Nation und Religion in der deutschen Geschichte*, Frankfurt et al. 2001; Friedrich Wilhelm GRAF, *Die Nation – von Gott »erfunden«? Kritische Randnotizen zum Theologiebedarf der historischen Nationalismusforschung*, in: Gerd KRUMEICH/Hartmut LEHMANN (eds.), »Gott mit uns«. *Nation, Religion und Gewalt im 19. und 20. Jahrhundert*, Göttingen 2000, pp. 285–317.

73 The analysis is based on the German word »Opfer«, which can be translated either as »victim« or as »sacrifice«. Cf. for this topic in a broader perspective, Sonja GOLTERMANN, *Opfer. Die Wahrnehmung von Krieg und Gewalt in der Moderne*, Frankfurt a.M. 2017; Peter BERGHOF, *Der Tod des politischen Kollektivs. Politische Religion und Sterben und Töten für Volk, Nation und Rasse*, Berlin 1997, esp. pp. 145–152; Angelika DÖRFLER-DIERKEN, *Der Tod des Soldaten als Opfer. Protestantische Traditionslinien*, in: Manfred HETTLING / Jörg ECHTERNKAMP (eds.), *Beding*

themes such as the »sacrifice« of Jesus on the cross, which had been made at Golgotha for the redemption of all people. The sacrifice of each individual soldier was similarly viewed as playing a decisive role in the redemption of the fatherland – on the one hand, by helping to attain an ultimate German victory in the war, and, on the other hand, by helping to accomplish the kingdom of God, which the theologians believed to be spreading in the world by a process, in which the First World War was a milestone. After the German defeat in 1918, the sacralization of death in battle was called into question by some theologians. For example, the missionary and Strasbourg pastor Albert Schweitzer viewed the mourning for the »victims« of the war as something that connected peoples, and should stand above national interests. He also called for a new respect for life, as opposed to death.

The next paper in this section shifts the focus away from state and church to show how the Baťa shoe company in interwar Czechoslovakia, founded in 1894 in Zlín, embedded its social engineering and the rationalized production of cheap shoes for a global market in an ideological programme of producing »new industrial men«, »new Czechoslovak men« or simply »Baťa men«. In his analysis of the company's social experiment, **Gregor Feindt** follows Gordon Lynch in understanding such ideals and normative claims as expressions of the sacred in modern societies. The ideas and role-models were perceived as »absolute, non-contingent realities«<sup>74</sup>, rendered exempt from critical debate and even considered worthy of veneration. The article moves beyond the metaphorical usage of religion in the study of political ideologies by focusing on the production of ideology and the sacred as a form of secular transcendence. Drawing on research on social engineering in political ideologies, Feindt confronts the Baťa style new industrial man with other totalitarian projects of new men, e. g., in Nazi Germany, Soviet Russia, or fascist Italy<sup>75</sup>.

Yet, Baťa's project differed from other cases of social engineering as the company lacked a clear ideology but fostered a cult of progress, machines and rational planning. Social engineering itself became the ideological underpinning of the shoe company and the new man its foremost sacralized ideal. Baťa established a School of Work which was conceived as the formative ground for the ideal employee who would take on an active role in the company and the world. The new man embodied rational progress and became an unquestionable and meaningful social fact, also because it was accepted by those working and living at Baťa. Ego-documents of Baťa employees as well as the cultural memory of the company town of Zlín showcase a strong personal belief in

erinnerungsbereit. Soldatengedenken in der Bundesrepublik, Göttingen 2008, pp. 75–84; Herfried MÜNKLER / Karsten FISCHER (eds.), »Nothing to kill or to die for ...« – Überlegungen zu einer politischen Theorie des Opfers, in: *Leviathan* 28 (2000), pp. 343–362.

74 LYNCH, *The Sacred in the Modern World*, p. 47.

75 Cf. Emilio GENTILE, *The Sacralization of Politics in fascist Italy*, Cambridge, MA 1996.

the company's norms and a self-understanding that centres on company and town. The sacralization of the new man and its company laid the foundation for a strong local sense of belonging that over time faded away into nostalgia. Feindt argues for an understanding of ideas as »concepts in action« in order to conceive of sacralization as a discursive and social process.

Secular ideologies like the »new industrial man« or rationalized industrial capitalism presented a challenge not only to rivalling ideologies that staked totalizing claims upon individuals at the time. They were also of major concern for Christian priests, theologians, and groups, both Protestant and Catholic. Indeed, some of the arguments put forward by the Christian actors at the centre of **John Carter Wood's** contribution to this volume can be read as a comment on secular ideologies of the »New Man«, emphasising that »the true way to create the ›new man‹ [was] to be found in Christianity alone«<sup>76</sup>. Wood's chapter focuses on the 1930s and 1940s as a particularly intense phase of Christian intellectual engagement, by churchmen, theologians, philosophers, and ecumenical activists, with secular »pseudo-religions«. Interwar totalitarian ideologies attained substantial political power, seemingly poised to overwhelm democracy, and Christian actors were prominent among those who identified – and critiqued – such movement's and regimes' claims to present all-encompassing, order-defining sets of unquestionable beliefs about the meaning of life and the aims of social life. Christian thinkers and intellectuals read the rise of secularisms, totalitarianisms, and industrial modernity as the elevation of »secular« ideals to a status previously held by religion, enabled by the spiritual vacuum left after the decline of Christian social influence. To them, Europe's political, cultural and social crises derived from a desacralization of »genuine« faith and the sacralization of »false« secular faiths – »messianisms« in contemporary parlance – as the »sole ultimate source and authority for the life of the individual and the community«. The solution, many argued, lay in a resacralization of Christian ideals. After the Second World War, the totalitarian threat – though not abolished – receded, and Christian attention shifted. Debates reveal that many anxieties previously attached to totalitarianism were now associated with the emerging »technological societies« symbolized, at one level, by the atomic bomb and, at another, by increasingly ubiquitous machines. While positive aspects of technology were by no means overlooked (whether as a means of reducing poverty and ignorance and increasing health and global interconnection), the most pressing question was another: What were the consequences for human life when secular ideals – such as rationalistic, materialistic technological progress predicated on secular notions of human omnipotence – were being sacralized? The mid-twentieth-century Christian critique of the »Promethean faith in man's

76 See John Wood's contribution in this volume, pp. 191–212.

collective power« anticipates current critiques of anthropocentric hubris, as raised against the discourse of the »good Anthropocene« with its elevation of the *anthropos* into a god-like status<sup>77</sup>.

### 3.4 Contested Sacralizations in the Anthropocene

The contributions of this section take up the theme of new conjunctures of the sacred triggered by the advent of the Anthropocene – the scholarly proposal to understand our present as a new geological epoch characterized by the irreversible planetary impact of human action. Determining the epochal character of the Anthropocene is the business of stratigraphy and the geological sciences. Yet, the concept has provoked profound reflection within the humanities not only about its beginnings and defining processes but also about the epistemological and ethical implications of planetary destabilization. While there are good reasons to conceive of climate as a sacralized force – created by human impact, yet overwhelming and threatening, both transcendent and immanent, and the object of multiple ritualized social actions – the contributions here focus on other key themes of multispecies coexistence on a damaged planet: the sacralization of non-human life, respectively Nature as space, and the ambivalences contained therein.

It is an interesting fact that in decades of sociological and theological controversy over secularization and the »disenchantment of the world«, the »world« of Weber's famous dictum has hardly ever been understood as the »natural world«. Disenchantment was about the loss of magic and about the loss of the sacred: But it was always more about the supernatural than about changing human relationships to the natural environment and their increasingly detrimental consequences. In his chapter, **Thomas Kirchhoff** takes the (de-)sacralization of nature by monotheistic religions as the first and the most ancient of altogether twelve types of (de-)sacralizations he distinguishes. His core argument is that »the cultural history of nature in Western societies – contrary to early theories of modernization and secularization – is not a history of the disappearance but rather a history of ever new kinds of sacralizations of nature«. The latter are broadly understood as »conceptualizations and perceptions of nature as divine, sacred, holy, awe-inspiring, sublime, all-embracing or comprehensive, intangible, non-negotiable« or as nature as an »absolute instance«. Focussing on modern Western societies Kirchhoff develops a typology of three desacralizations and nine sacralizations of nature.

77 See e.g., Clive HAMILTON, The Theodicy of the Good Anthropocene, in: *Environmental Humanities* 7/1 (2016), pp. 233–238, URL: <<https://doi.org/10.1215/22011919-3616434>> (07-17-2023).

Roughly distinguishing sacralizations originating in religious and non-religious spheres. They are markedly different in origin, scope, and social reach, and they illustrate that it is often quite difficult to assign sacralizations unambiguously to either a religious or a secular sphere. The typology remains open for additions and refinement and does not aim for comprehensiveness: One could easily think of further types, such as the recent flourishing of spirituality-based nature cures<sup>78</sup>, or the conjunctures of Christian theologies of creation<sup>79</sup>. Kirchhoff's typology, apart from convincingly illustrating his point that secularization has not abolished but actually provoked and created new sacralizations of nature, also reveals a profound ambiguity of the nature sacred. »Nature«, according to Kirchhoff, »is, by definition, predisposed to be sacralized« for it is imagined as the absolute, non-human opposite of culture and technology.

A popular notion associated with the Anthropocene is the alleged »end of nature«, denoting that with anthropogenic climate change no corner of the Earth remains unaffected by human impact. As a rejoinder to this totalizing claim, nature conservationists insist on the importance and survival of wilderness as Nature beyond human impact, also in the Anthropocene. The Serengeti National Park in Northwestern Tanzania plays a key role in these debates. **Bernhard Gissibl's** chapter traces the sacralizing logic and practices that transformed the Serengeti from an ecology of dynamic coexistence between pastoralists and wildlife into a superlative »place like no other« from the middle of the 20th century onwards. Arguing that it was not the natural features of the Serengeti but their cultural sacralizations, he distinguishes three powerful discursive figurations employed by nature conservationists that rendered the Serengeti »one of the ultimate sacred spaces of conservation«: wilderness, deep evolution, and the »circle of life«. All these figurations have deep colonial roots, probably deepest in the case of Western understandings of the Serengeti as a wilderness virtually unmodified by human impact. Gissibl traces this idea in its latest scientific guise as »ecosystem integrity«, which is the concept used by conservation biologists to legitimize both the idea that there still exists something like unmodified Nature (as challenged by Anthropocene discourse), and the current political ecology of conservation as

78 Samantha WALTON, *Everybody Needs Beauty*. In *Search of the Nature Cure*, London et al. 2021.

79 See e.g., Celia Deane DRUMMOND, *A Primer in Ecotheology. Theology for a fragile Earth*, Eugene 2017; in the German context see Julia ENXING, *Schöpfungstheologie im Anthropozän. Gedanken zu einer planetarischen Solidarität und ihrer (theo)politischen Relevanz*, in: Martin M. LINTNER (ed.), *Mensch – Tier – Gott. Interdisziplinäre Annäherungen an eine christliche Tierethik*, Baden-Baden 2021, pp. 161–180; Michael ROSENBERGER, *Christian Ethics of Creation. On the Path of Ecological Conversion*, Baden-Baden 2022; Margit WASMAIER-SAILER / Michael DURST (ed.), *Schöpfung und Ökologie*, Freiburg et al. 2023.

practised in the Serengeti ecosystem. The reading of the Serengeti as a site of deep hominin and human evolution originated with the first paleoanthropological findings before the First World War and gained such popularity that anthropologists even spoke of a »Serengeti hypothesis« of human evolution. This narrative promoted the Serengeti as a Pleistocene or even older landscape sacralized for producing »us« as a species. Finally, the sacralization of the Serengeti as the localization of transcendent principles of Life rests upon the evolution of understanding the Serengeti's wildlife not merely as abundant, but characterized by the annual cycle of an increasingly »Great Migration« that was made possible by the removal of the Serengeti's former human residents in what Gissibl terms the »conservation revolution« of 1959: the replacement of centuries, if not millennia of multispecies coevolution through a regime of sacralized Nature governed by expert science. These narratives were closely associated with tourist consumption and capitalist commodification of the Serengeti, and they helped eclipse older, alternative, local and marginalized ontologies of the Serengeti as a sacred landscape. Therefore, Gissibl argues for the necessity of placing any promotion and conjunctures of sacralized Nature in their respective political ecologies. Indeed, the significance of the Serengeti as an epitome of sacralized Nature may not only lie with its undeniable potential of experience human kinship with other forms of life on Earth, but also in the danger that the creation and conjuncture of sacred Nature glosses over the very real conflicts associated with the politics and management of situated and specific ecosystems in concrete places. Thus, the Serengeti not only illustrates unresolved tensions between different understandings of sacred nature and the human place in it. Its conflicts also caution against too benevolent expectations of the transformative power of dark green religions.

The final chapter in this section adopts a critical perspective on recent theological engagements with animal studies to expose the intimate entanglement of Christian monotheism with animal sacrifice – a major obstacle to any theology aiming to actually improve the fate of animals. **Simone Horstmann** shows how animals, in the context of monotheistic religions, became actors as well as objects of sacralizing and desacralizing processes, historically and structurally. The relationship between monotheism and animals developed to the disadvantage of animals themselves, and the original scene of this detrimental relationship can be found in the biblical treatment of the Golden Calf in Exodus 32. The biblical text tells how the Israelites erected a Golden Calf as a cult image during Moses' absence, to which they also offered sacrificial animals. Upon his return, Moses destroyed the cult image by burning it and crushing it into powder. He then mixed the powder with water, which the Israelites had to drink. The desacralization or the complete destruction of the Golden Calf was thus connected with the eating of the cult image, just

as previously the cult around the Golden Calf itself (its sacralization) had been connected with the sacrifice and eating of animals. The eating and consumption of animals, Horstmann deduces from the biblical story, thus had both a sacralizing and a desacralizing component. Emphasizing the structural link between animality and their religiously sanctioned edibility, Horstmann relates this example to current debates triggered by the Anthropocene diagnosis. The very constellation between profaned animality and edibility can be found in today's mass slaughterhouses: Here, animals are not seen as subjects with a right to inviolability but are regarded only as objects that may be killed so that humans can eat them. For all the differences that can be observed, the biblical story and the mass slaughterhouse converge in their treatment of animals as fundamentally consumable. It constitutes and consolidates the conviction that non-human animals are completely destructible, if not downright annihilable.

This finding is particularly pertinent in light of the tendency toward a resacralization of nature that can be observed in recent decades. Horstmann refers, with recourse to Mircea Eliade, to New Animism and the critique of the Judeo-Christian profanation of the natural environment made prominent by medievalist Lynn White Jr. in the 1960s, while Christian theologians, too, have recently advocated the resacralization of the natural co-world. One important strand of thinking here is panentheism, a theistic theology that understands creaturely reality as part of God and is often understood as a theological bridgehead to an animistic understanding of nature. However, as Horstmann unmistakably makes clear, actual animals rarely play a role here. She emphasises that in the monotheistic religions both radically profaned and resacralized animals still share one and the same fate of being killed and eaten by humans. The critical concept Horstmann offers to address these necropolitics of monotheism is *decreation*. It highlights that, in monotheistic religions, both sacralization and desacralization processes involving animals are structurally linked: Both *decreate* animals and thus not only ensure their complete consumability through their complete dismemberment and utilization but also establish this consumability in the first place. Theological discourses that try to valorize other animals but operate along the logic of sacred and profane, often overlook this highly problematic, historical and structural intersection: As long as animals are considered edible here and there, as long as their consumability is confirmed by theologically moderated processes of desacralization as well as sacralization alike, all other strategies for a fundamental new understanding of animal life necessarily reinforce the status quo of an ultimately religious impregnated and legitimized violence against animals.

**Johannes Paulmann** closes the volume with a plea for a historically sensitive, generic approach to processes of sacralization and desacralization. He starts with a reflection of etymologies and key concepts, discussing, amongst

others, the etymological origins of the Latin *sacer* and *profanum* as a constitutive distinction for the sacred. The Roman World, confessional controversies within Christianity and the colonial encounter with non-Christian societies decisively shaped European ideas of the sacred. Paulmann briefly illustrates this point by charting the intellectual trajectory of the *feitiço*, a word from the terminology of Catholic Portuguese to oust deviant practices. Given the word's disqualifying function and negative connotation for centuries, it is not without irony – and indicative of the pluralization of socially accepted sacralities – that the fetish is no longer regarded as aberrant but alternative. As such, it has developed into a key concept of European self-understanding during the 20th century, e. g., critically deployed to capture the collecting craze of European museums, and conceptually appealing particularly in neo-materialist and posthuman cultural studies<sup>80</sup>.

Paulmann portrays the decades around 1900 as the birth of sacrality as a »heuristic concept«, distinguishing essentialist notions of the sacred as numinous and radically Other (which remained dominant within the theologies), and the social constructivist approach associated with Émile Durkheim and his school. Advocating for a neo-Durkheimian approach as espoused by sociologist Gordon Lynch<sup>81</sup>, he applies this understanding to exemplary cases of things (relics), spaces (churches), persons, and concepts (nation, human rights), all of which had been sacralized at various times and places in European history. He uses the analytical distinction between religious and secular spheres to trace sacralization processes within and across the spheres of the religious and the secular. In doing so, his approach undermines teleological readings of both secularization and (de)sacralization as potentially »dangerous nouns« of long-term processes<sup>82</sup>. Instead, the contingent dynamics of desacralizations and sacralizations become visible – and the analytical potential of sacralization as a cultural concept.

80 Hartmut BÖHME, *Fetishism and Culture. A Different Theory of Modernity*, Berlin 2014; Rosalind C. MORRIS / Daniel H. LEONARD (eds.), *The Returns of Fetishism: Charles de Brosses and the Afterlives of an Idea: with a new translation of On the Worship of Fetish Gods*, Chicago 2017; Sean BRAUNE, *Fetish-Oriented Ontology*, in: *Open Philosophy* 3/1 (2020), pp. 298–313, URL: <<https://doi.org/10.1515/opphil-2020-0101>> (07-17-2023).

81 LYNCH, *Sacred*, pp. 716–718, URL: <<http://dx.doi.org/10.4135/9781529714401.n403>> (07-17-2023).

82 David MARTIN, *The Future of Christianity. Reflections on Violence and Democracy, Religion and Secularization*, Farnham 2011 p. 5; see further Hans JOAS, *Gefährliche Prozessbegriffe. Eine Warnung vor der Rede von Differenzierung, Rationalisierung und Modernisierung*, in: Karl GABRIEL et al. (eds.), *Umstrittene Säkularisierung. Soziologische und historische Analysen zur Differenzierung von Religion und Politik*, Berlin 2012, pp. 603–622.



# I. RELIGIOUS FIGURATIONS OF THE SACRED



Erin Lambert

## Sacred Matters in the Radical Reformation

When Leonhard Rumer stood trial in 1533, the accused Anabaptist made his beliefs about the material culture of the traditional church abundantly clear. He rejected church buildings as »cursed temple[s] of idols«, and he declared that there was no foundation for the veneration of Mary and the saints. The Mass, he concluded, was an idol that stank before God<sup>1</sup>. Rumer's brother Paul, who had been arrested alongside him, offered similar testimony. The scribe noted that »he [thought] nothing of the [traditional] church, rather he believe[d] in the community of God, which live[d] a Christian life, and Christ also went into the wilderness when he preached«<sup>2</sup>. Authorities in the region had already heard similar testimony from others in the preceding several years<sup>3</sup>. In 1531, Peter Schneider testified about what he had learned from an Anabaptist preacher's sermon: a true Christian should not believe in the teachings of men but in the invisible God who had created heaven and earth<sup>4</sup>. Still another accused Anabaptist, a smith named Ruprecht Hueber, proclaimed that he did not believe in the objects and rituals of the traditional church but only in God, the creator<sup>5</sup>. His testimony incorporated a common theme, a sentiment he shared with Schneider and Paul Rumer: the traditional church was idolatrous, the antithesis of the God who had created the world in a week.

- 1 »Die kirichen halt er nicht anders dann für ain verfluchten götztempl...«, Grete MECENSEFFY (ed.), *Quellen zur Geschichte der Täufer 14. Österreich*, vol. 3, Gütersloh 1983 [hereafter QGT14], pp. 160f. Unless noted, all translations are mine.
- 2 »Von der kirichen, die wir haben, halt er nit, sondern auf die gmain Gottes, die ain cristenlich leben füert, und Christus sey auch in die wüest gangen, wan er gepredigt hab«, *ibid.*, p. 158.
- 3 On the history of Anabaptism in this region, see Werner O. PACKULL, *The Beginning of Anabaptism in Southern Tyrol*, in: *Sixteenth Century Journal* 22 (1991), pp. 717–726; *id.*, *Hutterite Beginnings. Communitarian Experiments During the Reformation*, Baltimore 1999; Johann LOSERTH, *Der Anabaptismus in Tirol von seinen Anfängen bis zum Tode Jakob Hutters (1526–1536)*, Vienna 1892; Elke PARK, *Untereinander Gleich Und Alle Ding' Gemein. Täuferische Bewegungen in Tirol 1527–1534*, in: *Mennonitische Geschichtsblätter* 59 (2002) pp. 13–44.
- 4 Grete MECENSEFFY (ed.), *Quellen zur Geschichte der Täufer 13. Österreich*, vol. 2, Gütersloh 1972, p. 454.
- 5 *Id.*, QGT14, pp. 176f.

At first glance, such statements seem to support traditional narratives that emphasized the Reformations' desacralization of the world<sup>6</sup>. There could be no clearer example of disenchantment, it might seem, than Anabaptist culture. By insisting upon the consensual baptism of adult believers, Anabaptists emphasized inward transformation and the cultivation of belief through true understanding of Scripture<sup>7</sup>. They resolutely denied any physical presence in the Eucharist and divorced ritual from any specific material setting<sup>8</sup>. Anabaptists such as the Rumer brothers, it might appear, had no place for the visual and the material in their faith and practice. Indeed, Karl Koop notes that Anabaptists generally shifted the idea of the sacred »away from a natural and material jurisdiction to the realm of the anthropological and the ecclesiological«<sup>9</sup>. Although scholars have increasingly complicated the traditional narrative of Protestant desacralization, the radical Reformation remains on the margins of this historiography, and Anabaptism is still widely perceived to be an aniconic, spiritualistic faith<sup>10</sup>.

Yet even as the Tyrolean defendants denounced the material culture of the traditional church, they also suggested that a different sort of material might be capable of revealing the divine. Again and again, the interrogation records recount how Anabaptists in the region rejected the possibility of encountering the divine in devotional objects but viewed the stuff of the natural world as

- 6 Scholars have increasingly critiqued these narratives; for a historiographical overview, see Alexandra WALSHAM, *Migrations of the Holy. Explaining Religious Change in Medieval and Early Modern Europe*, in: *Journal of Medieval and Early Modern Studies* 44/2 (2014), pp. 241–280; id., *The Reformation and the Disenchantment of the World Reassessed*, in: *Historical Journal* 51/2 (2008), pp. 497–528. However, the grand narrative of the Reformation as a desacralizing force remains powerful: see Charles TAYLOR, *A Secular Age*, Cambridge 2007, especially Part I, and Brad S. GREGORY, *The Unintended Reformation. How a Religious Revolution Secularized Society*, Cambridge, MA 2015.
- 7 For overviews of the history of early modern Anabaptism, see John D. ROTH/James M. STAYER (eds.), *A Companion to Anabaptism and Spiritualism, 1521–1700*, Leiden 2007; and George Huntston WILLIAMS, *The Radical Reformation*, University Park 1995.
- 8 On the Anabaptist Eucharist, see John D. REMPEL, *Anabaptist Theologies of the Eucharist*, in: Lee Palmer WANDEL (ed.), *A Companion to the Eucharist in the Reformation*, Leiden 2014, pp. 115–138; on worship, see John M. JANZEN, *Anabaptist-Mennonite Spaces and Places of Worship*, in: *Mennonite Quarterly Review* 73/2 (1999), pp. 151–165.
- 9 Karl KOOP, *Migrations of Enchantment in the Radical Reformation: The Undoing of a Material and Natural World*, in: Ulrich DUCHROW/Craig NESSAN (eds.), *Befreiung von Gewalt zum Leben in Frieden. Liberation from Violence for Life in Peace*, Münster 2015, pp. 223–261, at p. 251.
- 10 Chad MARTIN, *Visual Images as Text? Toward a Mennonite Theology of the Arts*, in: *Conrad Grebel Review* 23/3 (2005), pp. 33–39, at p. 33. However, the absence of images should not be equated with the rejection of the visual: see David FREEDBERG, *The Myth of Aniconism*, in: Id., *The Power of Images. Studies in the History and Theory of Response*, Chicago 1989, pp. 54–81.

matter capable of manifesting God's omnipotence and benevolence. Leonhard Rumer dwelled at length on the distinction between divinely created and man-made things, citing Acts 7: »the Most High does not dwell in houses made with human hands; as the prophet says, »Heaven is my throne, and the earth is my footstool. What kind of house will you build for me, says the Lord? [...] Did not my hand make all these things?«<sup>11</sup>. Rumer highlighted an enduring paradox: scripture told him that human works could not represent or contain an utterly transcendent God. Yet Rumer could not entirely separate himself from the material, as every element of the world had been crafted by the hand of God, and as such, it had the potential reveal traces of the divine as no man-made object could.

The Tyrolean testimony thus evokes the complexity of early sixteenth-century Anabaptist conceptions of the material. Although these views are particular to this time and place, they raise much larger questions about how the Reformations reshaped views of the material world. By exploring the writings of Anabaptist theologians who considered the nature of God's presence in matter, this chapter seeks to understand how they conceived of the ability of the human senses to encounter God in creation, and in turn, how this complicates our understanding of the processes of reform and desacralization in this period. Rather than rejecting the possibility of locating the divine within the material world, these Anabaptists insisted upon creation's profound sanctity and articulated specific ways of viewing matter in order to perceive divine truths within it. Their theology complicates any simple distinctions between the spiritual and the material, or the sacred and the profane. Far from desacralizing the material world, they instead suggest that we might begin to conceive of an Anabaptist material culture of creation. By invoking a very different sort of matter than the devotional objects that typically fill studies of sacred material culture, the perspective of Anabaptism also broadens our understanding of what religious materiality itself meant in the Reformation period.

At the same time, Anabaptist attention to the matter of creation further calls into question the trope of the Reformation's denigration of visual communication and challenges assumptions about the advancement of text as the sole source of spiritual truth. Instead of inexorable progress towards the logocentrism of the modern world, Austrian Anabaptist theology reveals the endurance of visual piety – an argument that is well established in the historiography of mainstream Protestantism, but which has not been given full consideration in the context of the radical Reformation. In place of a radical rupture or a clear narrative of the triumph of text, Anabaptist sources instead enable us to consider a period of push and pull between various ways

11 MECENSEFFY (ed.), QGT14, p. 160; Acts 7:48–50. Biblical references are to the New Revised Standard Version.

of understanding human access to divine truth. As Alexandra Walsham has noted, narratives of modernization and disenchantment have traditionally led us to overlook these transitional moments, in which multiple ways of viewing the world remained operative, while at the same time, efforts to eschew these narratives have sometimes led historians to minimize moments of rupture<sup>12</sup>. To illuminate the paradoxical transformations and continuities of this period, this chapter situates the Tyrolean Anabaptist testimony within the larger context of late medieval debates about holy matter. Against this background, I then explore the enigmatic »gospel of all creatures«, which was promoted by Hans Hut and his followers, and consider its implications for a set of interconnected issues that have been central to broader narratives of Reformation, progress, and desacralization: the advancement of text as the primary means of revelation, the declining role of vision as a means of access to the divine, and the separation of matter and spirit. Together, the testimony of imprisoned Anabaptists and the writings of Anabaptist leaders enable us to recover a period of intense questioning, however transitory, about what the turn to the word would mean for the Christian's relationship with the material world.

## 1. Defining Holy Matter

As Caroline Walker Bynum has argued, the nature of holy matter was a central theological problem in the later Middle Ages, and she suggests that debates about it were among the most important contributors to the fragmentation of traditional Christendom in the sixteenth-century Reformations<sup>13</sup>. According to Bynum, »holy matter« – relics, sacramentals, images, statues, and the material used in the sacraments – paradoxically posed both conceptual problems and possibilities<sup>14</sup>. Because God created the world and became incarnate in Christ, matter had the potential to manifest the divine. By nature, matter was also ever-changing, and as such, it might reveal God's power, if, for example, a Host began to bleed, or a statue came to life. At the same time, however, matter's natural qualities insisted that God was wholly other; its transformation and inevitable decay made it the utter opposite of an eternally

12 WALSHAM, *Migrations of the Holy*.

13 Caroline Walker BYNUM, *Christian Materiality. An Essay on Religion in Late Medieval Europe*, New York 2015, p. 272.

14 BYNUM, *Christian Materiality*, pp. 34f. On Bynum's concept of »Christian materiality« as an analytical category, see Aden KÜMLER, *Materials, Material, »Materiality«*, in: Conrad RUDOLPH (ed.), *A Companion to Medieval Art. Romanesque and Gothic in Northern Europe*, Hoboken 2019, pp. 95–117, at pp. 109f.

enduring God<sup>15</sup>. According to Bynum, this medieval paradox remained at the heart of sixteenth-century Christians' divergent understandings of the nature of Incarnation, the Eucharist, and the use of images and objects in worship and devotion<sup>16</sup>.

With frequent references to stinking idols and open denials of the potency of holy water, the Tyrolean testimony contains clear, albeit fleeting, evidence that Anabaptist defendants – most of them artisans rather than educated theologians – were engaged with questions about the nature of holy matter. Their invocation of the created world as the foil for the idolatrous church also suggests that in order to understand the full complexity of the relationship between God and matter in Anabaptist culture, we must look beyond the images, objects, or consecrated elements that have been the subject of most studies of holy matter. Instead, we might adopt the definition of »holy matter« proposed by Sara Ritchey, who argues that we must follow medieval theologians and include the matter of the created world within this category as well. Ritchey suggests that the stuff of creation was considered to be holy matter because of the doctrine of re-creation: the incarnation of Christ entailed God's entrance into the mundane matter of the natural world, re-making it into matter capable of mediating God's presence<sup>17</sup>. Creation had been divine in origin but Adam and Eve's original sin had transformed it into fallen matter. Because the body of Christ had been made of the same matter out of which plants, animals, and the earth itself were comprised, that substance was remade by his crucifixion and resurrection, becoming holy like the body with which they were materially continuous. Thus while studies of »holy matter« have primarily focused on man-made objects, late medieval Christian categories were expansive enough to admit the stuff of creation as well<sup>18</sup>.

In this light, the Tyrolean prisoners' frequent contrasts between the material culture of the church and the matter of creation reflect ongoing efforts to draw distinctions within a category that was much broader, more complex, and more contradictory than we have often allowed. The materiality of Christ's incarnation and the doctrine of re-creation might seem to render all matter equivalent, with the implication that an ordinary rock and a carved statue must both be revered as holy objects or reviled as idols. Yet for the

15 BYNUM, *Christian Materiality*, pp. 34f. and 284–286. See also ead., *Dissimilar Similitudes. Devotional Objects in Late Medieval Europe*, New York 2020, pp. 52f.; and Herbert KESSLER, *Seeing Medieval Art*, Peterborough 2004, p. 19.

16 BYNUM, *Christian Materiality*, p. 273.

17 Sara RITCHEY, *Holy Matter. Changing Perceptions of the Material World in Late Medieval Christianity*, Ithaca 2014, p. 10.

18 Although Bynum's focus is primarily on other forms of holy matter, she acknowledges that the conceptual challenges posed by devotional images and objects were informed by, and also extended to, the matter of creation as well: BYNUM, *Christian Materiality*, pp. 259–265.

defendants in the Tyrol, not all forms of matter were equally sacred. Their testimony implied that man-made idols led people away from God, while the matter of the natural world could reveal his presence. This distinction suggests that we must not only broaden our definition of the category of holy matter but also recognize the potential for complex differentiations within it. Ruprecht Hueber's testimony provides an important key to these gradations of meaning: Hueber clearly contrasted man-made objects with divine creation, implicitly invoking a medieval theological tradition that distinguished between God's activity as creator, the forces of nature that governed generation and corruption, and the work of the human artisan<sup>19</sup>. Anything made by human hands could be only an imitation of nature; it could not match God's own creation. Only God could create *ex nihilo* or form an archetype, and man-made objects offered only representation or artifice<sup>20</sup>. Although all visible things were composed of the material provided by God's initial creation of the world, it was possible to distinguish between that raw material and objects that had been made from it. In turn, while it was possible to argue that God's initial creation and Christ's incarnation made the divine present in all matter, the hands of a human artisan could either celebrate or obscure that presence. Hueber and the other prisoners did not deny that God might reveal himself through matter. But the objects and rituals of the traditional church had inhibited that revelation, remaking divinely-created matter into man-made idols. Thus, they had left the church behind and sought an unadulterated encounter with God, surrounded by the matter of his creation.

## 2. The Gospel of All Creatures

How, then, did Anabaptists conceive of the human ability to perceive God in created matter? Trial records, shaped by the perspectives of persecuting authorities, preserve mere traces of these ideas. An abundance of evidence comes from the writings of Anabaptist leaders who ministered in Austria and southern Germany. Their treatises reveal that far from severing connections between matter and the divine, early Anabaptists in this region conceived of multiple different relationships between God and the created world, even within a single text. In turn, they advanced a range of ways in which the senses might apprehend traces of the divine in matter. In so doing, the writings of

19 MECENSEFFY (ed.), QGT14, pp. 176f.

20 Marie-Dominique CHENU, *Nature, Man, and Society in the Twelfth Century. Essays on New Theological Perspectives in the Latin West*, ed. and trans. by Jerome TAYLOR/Lester K. LITTLE, Toronto 1997, pp. 39–41; Michael CAMILLE, *The Gothic Idol. Ideology and Image-Making in Medieval Art*, New York 1989, p. 35.



these Anabaptist theologians further confound any simple narrative of desacralization, and in its place, they instead suggest the enduring – or even intensifying – sanctity of creation.

The most striking, and most studied, references to the matter of creation appear in the writings of Hans Hut (c. 1490–1527), whose ideas give important insights into Anabaptist conceptions of sacred materiality and provided a foundation on which other South German and Austrian Anabaptist leaders built. Hut was strongly influenced by the theology of Thomas Müntzer and accepted re-baptism in Augsburg in 1526. He then undertook what was to be a brief but wideranging career as an Anabaptist missionary, and he traveled throughout central Germany, Moravia, and the Tyrol before his arrest and death in an Augsburg prison<sup>21</sup>. Central to Hut's ministry was his concept of the »gospel of all creatures«, which is widely understood to be particular to him and his circle. The texts composed by Hut and his followers, however, yield much broader insights into early Reformation discourses about whether matter might reveal the divine. In his 1526 treatise entitled *On the Mystery of Baptism*, Hut intervened in ongoing debates about the nature of revelation and the ability to encounter God in the material world. He specifically took aim at the Lutheran Reformation's emphasis on Scripture, suggesting that learned evangelical preachers offered false hope by proclaiming that Christians could be saved through faith but providing no guidance on how to develop it<sup>22</sup>. To cultivate such faith, Hut advanced a particular understanding of the Great Commission by building upon the ambiguity of the dative and genitive in German translations of Mark 16:15. It was incorrect, Hut argued, to presume as most translators did that this verse directed Christians to »preach the gospel to the whole creation«, with the implication that faith must develop from the written or spoken Gospel. Rather, for Christians to gain true understanding of Christ's teachings, they must »go into the whole world and preach the gospel of all creatures«<sup>23</sup>.

21 For a brief biography, see Herbert C. KLASSEN, *The Life and Teachings of Hans Hut*, in: *Mennonite Quarterly Review* 33 (1959), pp. 171–205 and 267–304; for the most comprehensive work on Hut, see Gottfried SEEBASS, *Müntzers Erbe. Werk, Leben und Theologie des Hans Hut*, Gütersloh 2002.

22 Lydia MUELLER (ed.), *Glaubenszeugnisse oberdeutscher Taufgesinnter*, vol. 1, Leipzig 1938; reprint: New York 1971, p. 13. Translated in Michael G. BAYLOR (ed.), *The Radical Reformation*, Cambridge 1991, pp. 152–171.

23 »...geet hin in die welt und predigent das evangelion aller creaturen«, emphasis mine. MUELLER, *Glaubenszeugnisse*, p. 15; BAYLOR, *Radical Reformation*, p. 156. Gottfried Seebass argues that Hut's translation was deliberate, not the result of ignorance or oversight as some had previously claimed, and that in addition to Mark 16:15, Romans 1:19 and Colossians 1:23 should be considered sources for Hut's concept of the gospel of all creatures: SEEBASS, *Müntzers Erbe*, p. 401.

According to Hut, those who recognized the true meaning of the Great Commission understood that Christ had commanded his disciples to acknowledge the presence of the Gospel in every element of the world God had created, and they were to help others do the same. In »fields, seed, thistles, thorns, and rocks«, the faithful might find proof of God's creative and regenerative power, and they could understand it without recourse to scriptural interpretation<sup>24</sup>. For Hut, this gospel of all creatures, not the preaching of the written Gospel, was the foundation of true Christianity. Those who relied on learned preachers to interpret Scripture could never understand its true meaning, because human agency distorted or diffused the power of the Gospel<sup>25</sup>. In creation, on the other hand, Christians could witness the unadulterated power of God and the sacrifice of Christ.

The created world, Hut argued, was filled with processes that illustrated Christ's suffering and made attentive Christians conscious of its redemptive purpose. The peasant understood that to plant a field, weeds must first be pulled out by their roots; the carpenter had to cut down trees before he might build a house<sup>26</sup>. In each of these processes, a creature must suffer so that something more beautiful and useful might take its place. As they dug rocks from their fields, chopped wood or led an animal to slaughter, Christians were to gain direct knowledge of the suffering of Christ. Only by contemplating the suffering of the creatures at their own hands, Hut argued, could it become possible for Christians to comprehend how God had brought about Christ's redemptive anguish on the cross. By fashioning raw material into a new form, the faithful could understand the transformative nature of Christ's sacrifice and how it had remade humanity. Only when they fully understood the work that this agony had accomplished would they be prepared to receive baptism – an act through which they became part of Christ's suffering and death themselves<sup>27</sup>.

Although scholars have extensively debated the purpose of Hut's gospel of all creatures, the role of materiality within it has not been a primary concern of historians. The concept was the subject of a flurry of studies in the 1960s and 1970s, and it has received occasional, more cursory attention in the intervening decades<sup>28</sup>. Above all, the historiography has dwelled on Hut's

24 MUELLER, *Glaubenszeugnisse*, p. 14; BAYLOR, *Radical Reformation*, p. 157.

25 MUELLER, *Glaubenszeugnisse*, p. 14.

26 *Ibid.*, p. 18.

27 *Ibid.*, pp. 19f.

28 For example, Walter KLAASSEN, Hans Hut and Thomas Muntzer, in: *Baptist Quarterly* 19/5 (1962), pp. 209–227; Steven E. OZMENT, *Mysticism and Dissent. Religious Ideology and Social Protest in the Sixteenth Century*, New Haven 1973, pp. 105f.; Werner O. PACKULL, *Mysticism and the Early South German-Austrian Anabaptist Movement 1525–1531*, Scottdale 1977, pp. 68f. Recently, see Jaime Adrián Prieto VALLADARES, *Das Evangelium aller Kreatur. Thomas Müntzers und Hans Huts*

intellectual debt to Thomas Müntzer, and in turn, to medieval mysticism<sup>29</sup>. As a result, scholars have rarely acknowledged that Hut was fundamentally engaged with the early sixteenth century's questions about materiality. Could God's will be revealed in the fallen world of matter, and if so, how? How could humans, bound as they were to the material world, apprehend divine truths?

Hut's answers to these questions took shape at the intersection of late medieval material piety and early sixteenth-century evangelicalism. With its focus on processes of birth, growth, and death, his text reveals an enduring understanding of created matter as vibrant and living. Far from being inert, it demonstrated the nature of an ever-active God, and in its suffering, it told the story of salvation. Notably, Hut's theology diverges in significant ways from medieval conceptions of holy matter. For Hut, the creatures were not containers for the divine, nor did he describe God's ongoing intervention in the matter of creation – ideas that were central to the medieval cult of images. Further, he never cited the doctrine of recreation that was so vital to medieval understandings of the sanctity of the created world; while he argued that creation revealed Christ's suffering, he did not suggest that suffering matter was continuous with the broken body of Christ. Rather, Hut defined the relationship between God and matter through the concept of the order of creation, adapted from the work of Müntzer, in which God created the world and placed humans in dominion over the rest of creation. For Hut, humans were positioned between God and the creatures, and studying their own relationships with creation provided a way to conceive of God's relationship to humanity. It was the Christian's own transformational work in the world that revealed how God's power and benevolence had been woven through every fiber of creation. Hut turned the mutability of matter – its capacity for change, manipulation, and decay that had so troubled theologians of the later Middle Ages – to new purposes. It was matter's very capability to be remade that enabled it to convey the nature of an all-powerful and eternal God.

Hut's formulation of the gospel of all creatures thus insisted on creation's materiality as a central subject of contemplation, and in so doing, maintained matter as an integral part of the Christian life. It was only among the stuff of

Botschaft für die heutige Welt, in: Ulrich DUCHROW / Craig NESSAN (eds.), *Befreiung von Gewalt zum Leben in Frieden. Liberation from Violence for Life in Peace*, Münster 2015, pp. 143–201. Valladares provides a summary of the historiography. See also brief treatments in KOOP, *Migrations of Enchantment*, pp. 252f. and Geoffrey DIPPLE, Hans Denck, Hans Hut, and Caspar Schwenckfeld, in: Ronald K. RITGERS / Vincent EVENER (eds.), *Protestants and Mysticism in Reformation Europe*, Leiden 2019, pp. 139–158, at pp. 148–150.

<sup>29</sup> KLAASSEN, Hans Hut and Thomas Muntzer; Gordon RUPP, Thomas Müntzer, Hans Huth, and the »Gospel of All Creatures«, in: *Bulletin of the John Rylands Library* 43/2 (1960/1961), pp. 492–519; Rollin S. ARMOUR, *Anabaptist Baptism. A Representative Study*, Eugene 1998, p. 74; SEEBASS, *Müntzers Erbe*, especially pp. 400–412.

creation, and with dirt or blood on one's hands, that true faith might begin. Rather than eliminating matter's role in the practice of faith, Hut redefined it. He implicitly rejected traditional actions such as kneeling in front of a statue or praying in front of an image; as finished products of a human artisan, these could not reveal the divine and only risked idolatry. Instead, it was the act of making itself that took on spiritual significance, and matter in the midst of transformation – in other words, at the moment when it was its most insistently material – that was worthy of contemplation. Above all, by identifying everyday processes as images of divine will, Hut implied that Christians should conceive of a God who could be encountered all the time, in any given place.

In its insistence upon creation's materiality, Hut's gospel of all creatures further complicates narratives about the Reformation's advancement of more interior forms of piety and the retreat of the divine from the material. As well, the gospel of all creatures confirms that the early Reformation's debates about visual and material piety were not restricted to the traditional objects of art historical study, and that we therefore might broaden our understanding of what visual and material culture meant in this period<sup>30</sup>. Considering the stuff of creation as visible and tactile matter, as Hut did, enables us to understand how it could be understood and interpreted as devotional or didactic material, and even, at times, as matter through which divine activity might be perceived. From the soil of the earth itself, to the smallest leaf that grew upon it, the matter of the natural world made foundational truths visible to those who had learned to see the world through the eyes of their faith and conceived of a material Gospel. The gospel of all creatures, as a result, also sheds new light on the fraught relationship between the word and the world that emerged in the early Reformation period.

### 3. Creation and/as Text

Genesis itself proposed that the word and the world were inseparable, as creation had occurred through God's word. Medieval theologians had long presented scripture and creation as God's two books, interconnected and yet distinct modes of making legible his will<sup>31</sup>. Although sixteenth-century reformers frequently referred to creation as the work of God and acknowledged that it might reveal divine traces, the growing emphasis on written

30 Useful here is the conceptual framework of the field of visual culture: for an introduction, see Ian HEYWOOD/Barry SANDYWELL (eds.), *The Handbook of Visual Culture*, London 2011.

31 Broadly, see CHENU, *Nature, Man, and Society*, p. 117; Arie Johan VANDERJAGT/Klaas van BERKEL (eds.), *The Book of Nature in Antiquity and the Middle Ages*, Leuven 2005.

scripture called into question the possibility of revelation in the natural world, despite its divine creation<sup>32</sup>. The writings of Hut and his followers, who also took up the gospel of all creatures, reveal the fraught nature of those questions in this historical moment, and they demonstrate how some sixteenth-century Anabaptist writers responded by making efforts to reconcile the word and the world.

Hut's repudiation of the Wittenberg Reformation reveals a deep unease with textual interpretation as the primary means of divining God's will; a learned preacher's explication of a text, Hut argued, reinstated the very abuses reformers sought to abolish with their rejection of Rome<sup>33</sup>. The works of Leonhard Schiemer (c. 1500–1528), who was deeply influenced by Hut and adopted the gospel of all creatures in his own theology, further reveal this skepticism about text as a means of direct access to God and place it in tension with creation. While in prison in 1528, Schiemer composed a catechism that explicitly questioned whether texts could reveal God's will. The catechist asks whether the catechumen knows what Jesus meant when he said to »preach the gospel of all creation«. Without giving the catechumen a chance to respond, the catechist further asks if they are »taught from texts or from God« and whether »one [who has been] taught by texts may be blessed«. Finally, the catechumen simply responds that they have been taught by God<sup>34</sup>. The exchange poses a contrast between the written word and creation as divergent means of encountering and understanding God. One who studied the »gospel of all creation«, Schiemer's catechism implies, learned directly from God in ways that one who simply read a text could not. Against those who argued that the word was the only way to encounter God, Schiemer suggested that there were truths that words could not fully convey.

This conviction also emerges in Hut's work. In *On the Mystery of Baptism*, Hut noted that Christ had not sent his followers to books to learn divine truths. Instead, Scripture provided a written record of a very different form of communication: the use of parables. Hut made it clear that a parable was not

32 Peter HARRISON, *The Bible, Protestantism, and the Rise of Natural Science*, Cambridge 1998. Reformation-era perspectives on nature as a work of divine creation, as well as its relationship to Scripture, were diverse, and their range is beyond the scope of this chapter. Susan E. SCHREINER, *The Theater of His Glory. Nature and the Natural Order in the Thought of John Calvin*, Durham 1991; H. Paul SANTMIRE, *Martin Luther, the Word of God and Nature. Reformation Hermeneutics in Context*, in: David G. HORRELL et al. (eds.), *Ecological Hermeneutics: Biblical, Historical and Theological Perspectives*, London 2010, pp. 166–180; Richard STRIER, *Martin Luther and the Real Presence in Nature*, in: *Journal of Medieval and Early Modern Studies* 37/2 (2007), pp. 271–303; and Kathleen M. CROWTHER, *Adam and Eve in the Protestant Reformation*, Cambridge 2010, chapter 4.

33 MUELLER, *Glaubenszeugnisse*, p. 14.

34 Transcribed and translated in Jason GRAFFAGNINO, *Leonhard Schiemer's Anabaptist Catechism (1527/28)*, in: *Southwestern Journal of Theology* 56 (2014), pp. 234f.

simply a story found in written scripture. Rather, Jesus had employed parables to encourage his followers to look to the physical world, and specifically, to contemplate the material effects of the work that they did so that they might understand what God had accomplished through the Incarnation and sacrifice of Christ. Jesus taught »to the gardener from trees, to the fishermen from the catch [...] and vintners from the vineyard«<sup>35</sup>. Although these parables were conveyed with words in the Bible, their significance was not in those words but in the actions they described, and in turn, the meaning those actions represented. Hut's text thus explored the boundaries between visual and textual revelation, and his gospel of all creatures rested on the principle that the material could convey spiritual truths in ways that words never could.

Where Hut proposed a relationship of representation between the word and the created world, another of his followers, Hans Schlaffer, collapsed distinctions between them. Schlaffer was active in mining towns and the surrounding countryside in the Inn Valley until his execution in February 1528, and he adopted elements of the gospel of all creatures, too<sup>36</sup>. Like Hut, Schlaffer cast creation, Scripture, and Christ as the three witnesses from which Christians could learn the teachings of the Gospel. And following Hut, Schlaffer argued that the everyday actions through which Christians engaged with creation had significance as processes of spiritual edification. But where Hut sometimes emphasized the contrasts between the written and created gospels, Schlaffer made more direct comparisons between reading the Bible and viewing the world: »the creatures«, he wrote, »are the book and living letters or text, which all people can and may read and understand«<sup>37</sup>. The metaphor of creation as text clearly draws upon the model of the book of nature, which is beyond the scope of this chapter<sup>38</sup>. Relevant here, though, are the implications of nature-as-text for engagement with the created world. Schlaffer's formulation implies that those who were attuned to the significance of creation might perceive grammar and syntax within plants, animals, and natural processes, enabling the Christian to comprehend the larger message that was collectively communicated in all of creation. His description of the natural processes through which Christians might contemplate Christ's suffering clearly

35 »Den gartner leeret er das evangelion bei den baumen, dem fischer bei dem fischfang [...] die weingartner bei dem weingarten [...]«. Hut provides examples from more than a dozen trades. MUELLER, *Glaubenszeugnisse*, p. 17; BAYLOR, *Radical Reformation*, p. 158.

36 PACKULL, *Hutterite Beginnings*, pp. 58f.

37 »Dan die creaturen sein das buech und lebendigen buechstaben oder geschrift, die alle menschen können und mögen leesen und versten [...]«. MUELLER, *Glaubenszeugnisse*, p. 87.

38 On early modern treatments of the book of nature, see Klaas van BERKEL/Arjo VANDERJAGT (eds.), *The Book of Nature in Early Modern and Modern History*, Leuven 2006.

echoes Hut, yet Schlaffer's recourse to the metaphor of the book is striking in its granularity and linearity. As with a text, the gospel in the creatures was to be read from beginning to end. Schlaffer encouraged his readers to dwell on the transformative actions of plucking a chicken and preparing it for the table, then chewing and swallowing its meat<sup>39</sup>. Much like a text to which one might refer or a preacher who might explicate the word, the created world could also respond to questions posed by those who knew how to understand its answers. In order for creation's meaning to become legible, Schlaffer placed the Christian in a constant dialogue with the created world, drawing on the words of Job: »Speak with the earth, it will answer you. Ask the animal, it will give you an answer; the birds in the air and the fish in the sea will show you«<sup>40</sup>.

The works of Hut, Schiemer, and Schlaffer thus reveal efforts to wrestle with and ultimately resolve the early Reformation's tensions between matter and text as modes of revelation, and between seeing and reading as forms of spiritual edification. Their emphasis on creation as a form of scripture and their frequent comparison of creatures and text reflect the evangelical hope that the Bible would provide unimpeded access to the voice of God. Yet their texts also reveal – perhaps surprisingly for a period so often associated with scripture alone – an awareness of the limitations of words, as well as the deep endurance of vision as the early sixteenth-century person's primary mode of engagement with the world.

#### 4. The Invisible in the Visible

Peter Harrison has noted that as text was increasingly treated as authoritative, early modern natural philosophers turned to the metaphor of the book of nature in an effort to legitimize their attention to the natural world. This marked a shift from the visual metaphor of nature as mirror, which had been more prominent in the Middle Ages, and it reflected the advancement of reading over seeing as the primary means of learning about the world<sup>41</sup>. Hut, Schiemer, and Schlaffer took a different approach: they used comparisons between the written Bible and the book of creation to call into question the primacy of textual interpretation. In the process, they affirmed the power of vision, both physical and mystical, as a means of access to the divine. Assumptions

39 MUELLER, *Glaubenszeugnisse*, p. 86.

40 »Darumb spricht Job: redt mit der erden, si wirt dir antworten, frag das vich, es wirt dir antwort geben, die vögel in lüften und die visch im meer werden dirs zaigen«, paraphrased from Job 12:7–8. *Ibid.*, p. 87.

41 Peter HARRISON, *The »Book of Nature« and Early Modern Science*, in: BERKEL / VANDERJAGT (eds.), *The Book of Nature in Early Modern and Modern History*, pp. 1–26, at pp. 2f.

about the Reformation's denigration of images have largely been put to rest by a wealth of scholarship that has emphasized the vitality of visual communication in this period<sup>42</sup>. We know little about ways of seeing in the radical Reformation, however. The works of Hut and his followers reveal that in place of a dualistic separation of matter and spirit that inherently devalued the visual and material, this branch of the radical Reformation remained deeply engaged with questions about how the eye might see the divine in matter.

Multiple different modes of perception were at work in the devotional culture of the early 16th century<sup>43</sup>. The first, didactic vision, in which visible objects served as »books« for the illiterate or mnemonic devices for the learned, had its roots in the writings of Pope Gregory the Great, who defended the making of images on the basis of their utility<sup>44</sup>. Second, mystical vision, exemplified by figures such as Heinrich Suso and Johannes Tauler, emphasized the process of ascending from visible to the invisible, using visible objects as signs of spiritual truths that were beyond the reach of the physical senses. The visionary who comprehended these signs might then progress to an inner process of picturing in the mind's eye, before finally arriving at direct divine revelation<sup>45</sup>. Robert Scribner also described a third form of vision, »sacramental seeing«, in which »the mere act of looking in faith made present the supernatural«<sup>46</sup>. Sacramental seeing became increasingly central in the context of the material piety of the late 15th and early 16th centuries, most notably in devotion to images of the saints and in the practice of the elevation of the Host.

Each of these modes of seeing posited a different relationship between the viewer, the material world, and the divine, and as such, they were fundamentally at issue in Reformation-era debates about holy matter. Hut, Schiemer, and Schlaffer clearly drew upon these conceptions of the visual in their formulations of the gospel of all creatures. Their calls for Christians to look to the physical world in order to apprehend scriptural truths invoke the concept

42 On early modern debates about the reliability of vision, see Stuart S. CLARK, *Vanities of the Eye. Vision in Early Modern Culture*, Oxford 2007. On the persistence of visuality in the Reformation, see recently William A. DYRNES, *The Origins of Protestant Aesthetics in Early Modern Europe. Calvin's Reformation Poetics*, Cambridge 2019.

43 Robert W. SCRIBNER, *Ways of Seeing in the Age of Dürer*, in: Dagmar EICHBERGER/Charles ZIKA (eds.), *Dürer and His Culture*, New York 1998, pp. 93–117.

44 Herbert L. KESSLER, *Gregory the Great and Image Theory in Northern Europe during the Twelfth and Thirteenth Centuries*, in: Conrad RUDOLPH (ed.), *Companion to Medieval Art. Romanesque and Gothic in Northern Europe*, Hoboken 2019, pp. 221–244, at p. 221; SCRIBNER, *Ways of Seeing*, p. 98.

45 SCRIBNER, *Ways of Seeing*, p. 99. The full complexity of mystical vision cannot be treated here; see Jeffrey F. HAMBURGER, *Mysticism and Visuality*, in: Amy HOLLYWOOD/Patricia Z. BECKMAN (eds.), *The Cambridge Companion to Christian Mysticism*, Cambridge 2012, pp. 277–293.

46 SCRIBNER, *Ways of Seeing*, p. 99.



of didactic vision. Indeed, where it has been assumed that the Reformation's emphasis on preaching reoriented the hierarchy of the senses, placing hearing above seeing, their focus on the didactic utility of creation maintains the superiority of vision. Yet, they did not restrict the visual to the didactic role of illustration. Instead, they also cast the created world as the material setting in which the Christian might undertake a devotional process of mystical seeing.

In their formulations of the gospel of all creatures, Hut, Schiemer, and Schlaffer all dwelled upon creation's ability to render visible the invisible power of God. With this argument, they made clear reference to Romans 1:20: »ever since the creation of the world his eternal power and divine nature, invisible though they are, have been understood and seen through the things he has made«. As a work of God, all of creation was visible evidence of unseen divine power. Hut expounded on the utility of visible creation as a mode of access to knowledge of the invisible divine in a treatise on the interpretation of Scripture, which appeared in 1527. Contemplation of visible creation, Hut argued, was a necessary first step in the formation of true faith. Only by considering the material suffering of the creatures could one conceive of the nature of Christ's sacrifice as one progressed from recognition of visible processes to knowledge of their deeper meaning<sup>47</sup>. Schiemer's catechism similarly explained the utility of visible creation as a means of access to spiritual truths. The catechist asks how it is possible to see God, who is invisible. The catechumen responds that God can be seen »in the ordering of the heavens and the earth, together with all creation«<sup>48</sup>. God's works in creation, the catechism continued to instruct its readers, displayed his omnipotence, through which he created the world; his wisdom, through which he ordered creation; his goodness, which endowed all creatures with goodness in turn; and his mercy, which was displayed in every one of his works<sup>49</sup>. Much as Hut did, Schiemer placed particular emphasis on visible things found in the natural world, specifically pointing to the heavens, earth, and living creatures as evidence for God's attributes<sup>50</sup>. In so doing, he suggested that looking at the visible creature was a means of contemplating the God who had made it and whose will remained operative within it.

Hut and Schiemer thus seem to posit a visual process of ascent, in which Christians ultimately sought to progress beyond simply acknowledging the splendor of creation or witnessing the suffering of the creatures before their eyes, to true understanding of the glory of God and the anguish of Christ. Yet, this process did not result in the separation of matter and the divine, as treatments of mysticism sometimes presume, but instead drew attention to their

47 MUELLER, *Glaubenszeugnisse*, p. 49.

48 GRAFFAGNINO, *Leonhard Schiemer's Anabaptist Catechism*, pp. 242f.

49 *Ibid.*, pp. 244f.

50 MUELLER, *Glaubenszeugnisse*, p. 49.

intersection. Again, sixteenth-century writers built on familiar foundations. In their treatments of Romans 1:20, medieval writers advanced the image of creation as a mirror of the divine, with the visible world showing the reflection of the God who had made it, while at the same time, insisting upon his otherness and his remove from the physical world. As Jeffrey Hamburger has revealed in a study of the tradition of speculative vision that emerged from Romans 1:20, viewing the reflection of God's will in the mirror of creation, or considering the visible world as evidence of unseen divine power, did not necessarily entail the separation of the physical and the spiritual. Nor did it necessitate an allegorical relationship between creator and created<sup>51</sup>. Rather, Hamburger suggests that by dwelling on how the visible might reveal or relate to the invisible, mystical vision explored the boundaries between matter and divinity. Far from insisting upon their separation, speculation called attention to their intersection and emphasized their fundamental integration in the person of Christ and in the material creation of which his flesh was a part. In this light, Hut and Schiemer did not describe creation as visible evidence of the invisible divine to simply dismiss matter as a shackle to be cast off. As they called for the Christian to dwell within a world suffused with evidence of divine power, they insisted that creation did much more than reflect a distant God to whom Christians must ascend. Instead, creation revealed the power of its creator, reminding Christians that the mundane matter that surrounded them was, at their own hands, permeated with the suffering of Christ. Considering how that suffering had brought about their salvation was not meant to raise them to a remote, inaccessible God. Rather, it was to call attention to a God who was at work in the world and within Christians themselves.

Thus, it is notable that even though Hut and his followers did not maintain the concept of sacramental seeing that might bring about God's presence, they called for a visual process that recognized how he was *already* present<sup>52</sup>. Rather than desacralizing the world, these Anabaptist authors advocated ways of seeing that revealed its sanctity, urging Christians to view themselves within the sacred history of creation and locate themselves within a world that teemed with signs of God's creative power and his continuing care. Instead of encouraging detachment from creation, they called for Christians to turn their eyes to a world whose very matter was utterly suffused with the gospel.

51 Jeffrey F. HAMBURGER, *Speculations on Speculation. Vision and Perception in the Theory and Practice of Mystical Devotion*, in: Walter HAUG et al. (eds.), *Deutsche Mystik im Abendländischen Zusammenhang*, Tübingen 2000, pp. 353–408, at p. 379.

52 Werner Packull noted that this »radical immediacy« was central to early Anabaptism in the Tyrol. PACKULL, *Hutterite Beginnings*, p. 174.

## 5. Conclusion

In this light, we can return to defendants such as the Rumer brothers and their juxtaposition of the matter of creation with the idolatry of the church. When they and other prisoners in the Tyrol told the inquisitors that they did not believe in golden idols but only in God the creator, and when they left the »stone piles« to worship on mountaintops, their words entailed much more than colorful blasphemy<sup>53</sup>. Their brief statements invoked a clear contrast between different sorts of matter, and they took part, however obliquely, in ongoing debates about how the material might reveal the divine. Rather than rejecting the material, Anabaptists in the Tyrol celebrated the sacred matter of creation, and their faith entailed particular ways of seeing and handling the world. The evidence they left behind thus suggests that we must widen our view of visibility and materiality in the Reformation and look beyond the images and objects that have been the traditional domain of art historians. We must also reconsider the notion that these Anabaptists lacked a visual and material culture. While they denounced devotional objects and required no specific sacred space, we cannot assume that their faith was entirely divorced from the material world. Instead, their theology and practices entailed fully formed conceptions of the relationship between matter and the divine, and how the Christian might perceive it.

Austrian Anabaptist perspectives on created matter thus add new dimensions to our understanding of much broader Reformation-era debates about how the human senses might encounter God, and they add further evidence to a growing body of scholarship that questions the Reformations' desacralization of the world. Increasingly, historians have raised questions about whether the Reformation was a rupture, or whether we should instead view it as continuous with the medieval past<sup>54</sup>. The testimony and treatises of early Austrian Anabaptists suggest that both might, at once, be true<sup>55</sup>. In this time and place, learned theologians and ordinary believers alike rejected the medieval culture of holy matter and heeded the evangelical call to seek a revelation authored by God himself. Yet at the same time, they also insisted that matter remained a medium in which one might encounter the power of the divine. For them, it was among the mutable stuff of creation that true faith might begin, with eyes turned to the heavens in order to recognize the presence of God within

53 MECENSEFFY (ed.), QGT14, p. 126.

54 For example, Constantin FASOLT, *Hegel's Ghost. Europe, the Reformation, and the Middle Ages*, in: *Viator* 39/1 (2008), pp. 345–386.

55 In this argument, I echo WALSHAM, *Migrations of the Holy*, as well as KOOP, *Migrations of Enchantment*.

themselves and hands engaged in transformative work that revealed salvific sacrifice in the world. In the words and actions of Austrian Anabaptists, we find evidence of a material gospel of fertile fields and suffering flesh, and a created world that remained vibrantly sacred.

Benedikt Brunner

## Visible Saints and Contested Sacralities

Sacralization as Sanctification in the Context of  
Colonial Deathways in Boston, c. 1680–1728

### 1. Introduction

Death is a particularly semantically and ritually charged event in a community. In the face of death, it is the things that people consider most important that come up for discussion. For the Europeans who settled New England, death was omnipresent in many ways. European immigration led to a significant decimation of the number of Native Americans through the transmission of diseases and through forcible elimination<sup>1</sup>. In addition, life in the colonial contact zones was also associated with great dangers for the European settlers. One of the central tasks of the Puritan clergy was to act pastorally in the context of these deaths and to formulate orientation and instructions for action for those who continued to live. In Boston, as in European Protestantism at the time, there was a belief that a life led in an exemplary Christian manner would lead to a blissful death. By making sense of death for the community of settlers, the Puritan clergy developed ideas of a saintly life that was to be recognisably distinguished from non-Christians. These ideas were also incorporated in different ways into missionary efforts towards the Native Americans<sup>2</sup>. This chapter asks to what extent the Puritan expectations of people to be recognisable as visible saints collided with what they imagined as the Natives' ideas of sacredness.

First, the analytical terminology will be explained: namely, what is meant when this chapter speaks of funerary writings and what does the term »deathways« mean? Second, I will elaborate on the question why funeral writings can be seen as an instructive source genre for the colonial contexts in New

1 Cf. Daniel Scott SMITH / J. David HACKER, Cultural Demography. New England Deaths and the Puritan Perception of Risk, in: *Journal of Interdisciplinary History* 26/3 (1996), pp. 367–392; Alfred CROSBY, *The Columbian Exchange. Biological and Cultural Consequences of 1492*, Westport 1972; Philippa KOCH, *The Course of God's Providence. Religion, Health, and the Body in Early America*, New York 2021.

2 Cf. for an overview David E. STANNARD, *The Puritan Way of Death. A Study in Religion, Culture, and Social Change*, Oxford 1979, although it is a bit outdated.

England. This is done in a two-step approach. On the one hand, the significance of the concept of »visible saints« is reconstructed in the writings of Cotton Mather (1663–1728), who can be considered one of the most influential and important theologians from Boston from the time around 1700. In a second step, Experience Mayhew's (1673–1758) work »*Indian Converts*«, that was published during Mather's lifetime in 1727, will be analysed to deepen our understanding of Native American concepts of sacrality from a missionaries' point of view. By comparing these two accounts, this chapter intends to demonstrate that sacrality could be understood and conveyed in rather different ways and by no means remained unchallenged. In the process, sanctification became central to the Puritans' group-building processes, which also had an impact on their attitude towards and perception of Native Americans.

## 2. Terminological clarifications

In the following it will be explained what funeral writings are and what they can reveal about colonial negotiations of sacrality. Up to now, printed funeral sermons have been regarded primarily as a source genre of early modern Lutheranism. This is mainly the case because this genre can be traced back to Luther himself and was most widely known and produced in the Lutheran communities within the Holy Roman Empire<sup>3</sup>. Nevertheless, printed funeral sermons were also produced in reformed areas. In fact, apart from the Palatinate and Brandenburg-Prussia, they seem to have been particularly popular in Basel. Over the course of the 17th century the number of English Reformed prints increased, both in Britain and in Puritan New England<sup>4</sup>.

The aim of those sermons was to convey *doctrina* and *consolatio*. In other words, they sought to lay out central Christian doctrinal contents to the congregation, and they served to comfort the bereaved<sup>5</sup>. In its printed form, the

3 Cf. Benedikt BRUNNER, Die gedruckte Leichenpredigt als Erbauungsbuch. Eine Erfolgsgeschichte des 17. Jahrhunderts?, in: Medium Buch. Wolfenbütteler interdisziplinäre Forschungen 1 (2019), pp. 87–105, especially pp. 88–91.

4 Cf. Penny PRITCHARD, The Protestant Funeral Sermon in England, 1688–1800, in: Keith A. FRANCIS/William GIBSON (eds.), The Oxford Handbook of The British Sermon 1689–1901, Oxford 2012, pp. 322–337; Amy Nelson BURNETT, »To Oblige My Brethren«. The Reformed Funeral Sermons of Johann Brandmüller, in: Sixteenth Century Journal 36 (2005), pp. 37–54; Benedikt BRUNNER, Basler Leichenpredigten. Forschungsperspektiven auf einen europäischen Sonderfall, in: Basler Zeitschrift für Geschichte und Altertumskunde 120 (2020), pp. 29–60.

5 Cf. Irene DINGEL, »Recht glauben, christlich leben und seliglich sterben«. Leichenpredigt als evangelische Verkündigung im 16. Jahrhundert, in: Rudolf LENZ (ed.), Leichenpredigten als Quelle historischer Wissenschaften, vol. 4, Stuttgart 2004, pp. 9–36; Benedikt BRUNNER, To exhort, to edify and to commemorate. Funeral

funeral sermons consisted of a letter of dedication of varying length, the sermon, which forms the core part of the writing, and the curriculum vitae of the deceased. Epicedia, that is poems and songs, were often added, even though reformed Christians were more reserved in this respect<sup>6</sup>.

All in all, printed funeral sermons were a place for theological articulation. The theme of death offered an opportunity to reflect on different theological themes. Sermons often presented the entire history of salvation and discussed it with varying degrees of detail and with specific emphases according to the taste of the individual preacher. A further characteristic of the funeral sermons were their strong pedagogical and appellative intentions. They were not only intended to comfort but were seen as an opportunity to teach a whole range of theological subject matter as well as norms of living and dying<sup>7</sup>.

Funeral sermons thus conveyed key norms of life and death on a whole diverse thematic range<sup>8</sup>. Sermons were built around what the preachers considered particularly worthy to impart, and these aspects often found their way into the title. This chapter will focus on the almost archetypal, classical narrative of funeral writings: the righteously lived life leads to a blissful, peaceful death, or at least to a death that brings peace and redemption<sup>9</sup>. In other words: a holy life is sealed with a successful death. Because of this focus on the right or desirable type of death, funeral writings allow us insights into historic »deathways«. This term was invented by historian Erik Seeman to refer to the study of »deathbed scenes, corpse preparation, burial practices, funerals, mourning, and commemoration«<sup>10</sup> in order to explore how people died and which norms were articulated and conveyed in this context. The important

Sermons as Instruments to convey »Lifestyles« and Deathways in 17th and early 18th Century Protestantism, in: Martin CHRIST (ed.), *Early Modern Cultures of Death. Graveyards, Burials and Commemoration in Central Europe, c. 1500–1800* [in Print].

6 Cf. for a influential definition Rudolf LENZ, *Leichenpredigten. Eine Quellengattung*, in: *Blätter für deutsche Landesgeschichte* 111 (1975), pp. 15–30.

7 Cf. DINGEL, *Glauben*.

8 Cf. for instance Femke MOLEKAMP, *Seventeenth-Century Funeral Sermons and Exemplary Female Devotion: Gendered Spaces and Histories*, in: *Renaissance & Reformation* 35 (2012), pp. 43–63; Penny PRITCHARD, »Speaking Well of the Dead«. *Characterization in the Early Modern Funeral Sermon*, in: Lisa STEINBY / Aino MÄKIKALLI (eds.), *Narrative Concepts in the Study of Eighteenth-Century Literature*, Amsterdam 2017, pp. 249–268; Austra REINIS, »Admitted to the Heavenly School«. *Consolation, Instruction, and Admonition in Aegidius Hunnius's Academic Funeral Sermons*, in: *Sixteenth Century Journal* 38 (2007), pp. 995–1012; Benedikt BRUNNER, *Was passiert mit dem »stinkenden Madensack«? Der Umgang mit dem Tod als Lackmustest der reformatorischen Bestimmung von Leib und Seele*, in: *Theologische Zeitschrift* 76/2 (2020), pp. 164–190.

9 Cf. DINGEL, *Glauben*.

10 Erik R. SEEMAN, *Death in the New World. Cross-Cultural Encounters, 1492–1800*, Philadelphia, PA 2010, p. 1.

role of the deathbed for the analysis of early modern norm constellations has been repeatedly emphasised in recent research<sup>11</sup>.

For most of the Early Modern times in the west, sacrality is something which refers to the transcendental<sup>12</sup>. The British Cultural sociologist Gordon Lynch defines sacred as all that is »by what people collectively experience as absolute, non-contingent realities which present normative claims over the meaning and conduct of social life«<sup>13</sup>. Sacred things are ascribed a special quality. Lynch adds a third category of distinction to his description of the usual dichotomy of sacred and profane with the mundane<sup>14</sup>. In the early modern religious context, however, these distinctions are very difficult to trace or assign in a clear-cut way. In the following, it will therefore not be a question of whether something was actually perceived as sacred by contemporaries. Instead, the focus is on the normative attributions as sacred.

For a deeper understanding of the social interactions through which something becomes sacred, respectively loses this status again, the process categories of sacralization and desacralization are useful<sup>15</sup>. With this term I refer to processes through which something is made or seen as absolute, inviolable and order-defining. In the sources analysed in this chapter, this happens through language and performative acts around the deathbed. In Boston, conversion and the corresponding »pious way of live« played a particularly important role. On the occasion of death, certain ways of life, virtues and

11 Cf. for instance Hillard von THIESSEN, *Das Sterbebett als normative Schwelle. Der Mensch in der Frühen Neuzeit zwischen irdischer Normenkonkurrenz und göttlichem Gericht*, in: *Historische Zeitschrift* 295 (2012), pp. 625–659; Erik R. SEEMAN, *Reading Indians' Deathbed Scenes. Ethnohistorical and Representational Approaches*, in: *Journal of American History* 88 (2001), pp. 17–47 and the contributions in the forthcoming volume by Benedikt BRUNNER / Martin CHRIST (eds.), *The Moment of Death in Early Modern Europe, c. 1450–1800. Contested Ideals, Controversial Spaces, and Suspicious Objects*.

12 Cf. the interesting case study by Jonathan SHEEHAN, *Sacred and Profane. Idolatry, Antiquarianism and the Polemics of Distinction in the Seventeenth Century*, in: *Past & Present* 192 (2006), pp. 35–66; cf. also Klaus HERBERS, *Sakralität. Einleitende Bemerkungen*, in: Andrea BECK / Andreas BERNDT (eds.), *Sakralität und Sakralisierung. Perspektiven des Heiligen*, Stuttgart 2013, pp. 11–14; Gordon BLENEMANN, *Heiligkeit und Devianz in vormodernen Kontexten. Perspektiven einer möglichen Systematisierung*, in: Klaus HERBERS / Larissa DUECHTING (eds.), *Sakralität und Devianz. Konstruktionen – Normen – Praxis*, Stuttgart 2015, pp. 299–306.

13 Gordon LYNCH, *The Sacred in the Modern World. A Cultural Sociological Approach*, Oxford 2014, p. 29.

14 *Ibid.*, pp. 26–28.

15 Cf. the introduction of this volume and Johannes Paulmann's contribution. Furthermore: Magnus SCHLETTE / Volkhard KRECH, *Sakralisierung*, in: Detlef POLLACK et al. (eds.), *Handbuch Religionssoziologie*, Wiesbaden 2018, pp. 437–463. For an example of its application cf. Benedikt BRUNNER, *Heilige Stimmen. Die kommunikative Funktion der Toten in protestantischen Funeralschriften der Frühen Neuzeit*, in: *Jahrbuch für Kommunikationsgeschichte* 24 (2022), pp. 29–55.



qualities are presented in the Boston funeral writings as the central characteristics of a »Visible Saint«, as will be shown. Following Hans Joas' thesis of the »self-sacralization of collectives«<sup>16</sup>, the sources suggest that we should examine whether this might not be precisely such a process.

### 3. Cotton Mather's ideas about visible sacrality

The next part of this chapter will focus on the funeral writings by Cotton Mather and will explore the question of how this famous Boston Pastor ideally imagined a holy life. Mather was certainly the most influential theologian and intellectual of his time in New England<sup>17</sup>. His international reputation was based on his numerous publications, which were also printed in Europe, especially in England. In addition to his monumental interpretation of the entire Bible within the framework of the *Biblia Americana*, he also published a large number of pastoral oriented writings<sup>18</sup>.

More than 50 funeral writings can be ascribed to Mather's authorship. They all form part of the latter group of pastoral writings, which makes Mather the most prolific author within this genre from this period in New England<sup>19</sup>. Mather knew the English tradition of these sources and used them with the aim of conveying norms of living, dying, and mourning. Mather was a »Puritan« and a descendant of two prominent puritan dynasties of New England, the Mathers and the Cottons<sup>20</sup>. In addition, he also had a keen interest in natural science. He advocated the inoculation against smallpox<sup>21</sup>, was a member of the Royal Society of London and a skilled biblical scholar. As a puritan

16 Cf. Hans JOAS, *Die Macht des Heiligen. Eine Alternative zur Geschichte von der Entzauberung*, Frankfurt a. M. 2017, p. 423.

17 Cf. Kenneth SILVERMAN, *The Life and Times of Cotton Mather*, New York 1984.

18 Cf. Jan STIEVERMANN, *Prophecy, Piety, and the problem of historicity. Interpreting the Hebrew Scriptures in Cotton Mather's »Biblia Americana«*, Tübingen 2016; Michael P. WINSHIP, *Prodigies, Puritanism, and the Perils of Natural Philosophy. The Example of Cotton Mather*, in: *William and Mary Quarterly* 51/1 (1994), pp. 92–105.

19 Cf. for an overview William D. ANDREWS, *The Printed Funeral Sermons of Cotton Mather*, in: *Early American Literature* 5 (1970), pp. 24–44; David D. HALL, *Ways of Writing. The Practice and Politics of Text-Making in Seventeenth-Century New England*, Philadelphia, PA 2008, pp. 116f.

20 The discussion about this multi-layered term cannot be elaborated here. Cf., however, Michael P. WINSHIP, *Were There Any Puritans in New England?*, in: *New England Quarterly* 74/1 (2001), pp. 118–138.

21 Cf. Margot MINARDI, *The Boston Inoculation Controversy of 1721–1722: An Incident in the History of Race*, in: *William and Mary Quarterly* 61/1 (2004), pp. 47–76; Christopher VOIGT-GOY, *Puritanismus und Naturwissenschaft: Cotton Mather*, in: Matthias POHLIG / Detlef POLLACK (eds.), *Die Verwandlung des Heiligen. Die Geburt der Moderne aus dem Geist des Heiligen*, Wiesbaden 2020, pp. 382–393.

however, he was one of the »Hot Protestants«<sup>22</sup>, with all the theological and more specifically ethical implications this intellectual upbringing had for him.

The period in which Cotton Mather was socialised and lived underwent fundamental processes of change, partly due to the specific situation in North America, partly due to the particular developments of the British »Restoration«<sup>23</sup>. The end of Cromwell and the Puritan rule in England was a considerable mental turning point, since it now seemed hopeless that religion over there would »purify« itself in the same way as it had done with the Puritans in New England. For this generation of New England preachers, it can be said: »The Restoration also encouraged Puritan preachers to put new emphasis on New England's moral standing in a spiritual wilderness – one that now appeared to include England«<sup>24</sup>. The efficacy of the Mathers and their comrades in arms can be plausibly explained against this background. A whole series of regional catastrophes – droughts, crop failures, cold spells, and, not least, King Philip's War – gave the impression that God himself was providentially punishing them<sup>25</sup>. Theologically, the New Englanders, led by Boston clergy, developed their jeremiad, tailored to the specific situation, which contrasted the heroic origins of the founding, especially blessed by God, with a subsequent decline and fall, for which some also blamed the decisions on the Half-Way Covenant<sup>26</sup>. This controversial synodal decision was intended to open up the possibility of being able to baptise the children of parents who

22 Cf. Michael P. WINSHIP, *Hot Protestants. A History of Puritanism in England and America*, New Haven/London 2018, pp. 258–262; David D. HALL, *The Puritans. A Transatlantic History*, Princeton/Oxford 2019.

23 Vgl. David LEVIN, *Cotton Mather. The Young Life of the Lord's Remembrancer, 1663–1703*, Cambridge, MA/London 1978, pp. 1–56. David D. Hall understands Mather as part of the »Legacies« of the actual puritan time in New England, which ended around 1660, cf. HALL, *Puritans*, pp. 352–354. On the tension in the background between colonial autonomy and the imperial claims of the mother country, cf. Mark PETERSON, *Boston pays Tribute. Autonomy and Empire in the Atlantic World, 1630–1714*, in: Allan I. MACINNES/Arthur H. WILLIAMSON (eds.), *Shaping the Stuart World 1603–1714. The Atlantic Connection*, Leiden/Boston 2006, pp. 311–335.

24 Joseph A. CONFORTI, *Saints and Strangers. New England in British North America*, Baltimore, MD 2006, p. 99.

25 Cf. *ibid.*, p. 101.

26 Cf. *ibid.*, pp. 102f.; and of course, Sacvan BERCOVITCH, *The American Jeremiad*, Madison, WI 1978. It is important to keep in mind that with the »Half-Way Covenant«, the particularly elitist provisions on church membership from the earliest phase of Puritan settlement had already been softened to some extent during the period under study, because they no longer corresponded to the realities in the colony, cf. Robert G. POPE, *The Half-Way Covenant. Church Membership in Puritan New England*, Princeton, NJ 1969; Ralph F. YOUNG, *Breathing the »Free Aire of the New World«*. The Influence of the New England Way on the Gathering of Congregational Churches in Old England, 1640–1660, in: *New England Quarterly* 83/1 (2010), pp. 5–46; Katharine GERBNER, *Beyond the »Halfway Covenant«. Church Membership, Extended Baptism, and Outreach in Cambridge, Massachusetts, 1656–1667*, in: *New England Quarterly* 85/2 (2012), pp. 281–301.

did not have full membership in the congregations. Regional historical works were also influenced by this motif, above all Cotton Mather's *Magnalia Christi Americana*, which appeared in 1702 and had similar pastoral and ethical intention as his printed funeral sermons<sup>27</sup>.

Mather's writings give many indications of what he wanted to be understood as a holy life. The thematic orientation is already demonstrated by the title of one of his earlier funeral sermons which was published in 1697 on the occasion of the death of a Boston clergyman named Joshua Moody. Its title was: *The Way to Excel*. In it, Mather compiled thoughts on what he believed constituted a holy lifestyle similar to that of angels. He used the lapidated deacon Stephen as a model, or more precisely the passage from Acts 6:15: »Looking steadfastly on him, they saw his Face, as it had been the Face of an ANGEL«<sup>28</sup>. The angelic face in this context refers to both, the glory into which Stephen had entered and to the deceased Moody. Mather asks: »*What are those Excellencies, that would make a Saint, Look like an ANGEL?*«<sup>29</sup>

He qualifies that the advantages of the angels are not fully attainable for humans due to their own mortality and sinfulness. But Jesus Christ would make his children angels of the New World, this promise could be relied upon. At the same time, a permanent task of the Christian is to distinguish him- or herself as far as possible during his or her lifetime through a holy, that means, sanctified, way of life. He states »That the *Angelical Example* is to be imitated«<sup>30</sup>. He also suggests specific behaviours to serve this purpose. First the »continual *Apprehension* of GOD in our minds. In every *Place*, we may Apprehend GOD. Wherever we are, we may subscribe to that Article of Ancient Faith in Ps 139. 7. Lord, *Wither shall I flee from thy Presence?*«<sup>31</sup> The continual apprehension must be accompanied by an equally fervent dedication to God, »upon all that we *Have*, and all that we *Do*«<sup>32</sup>. For Mather, this explicitly included the worldly things of daily life:

27 Cf. Jan STIEVERMANN, »To Conquer All Things«. Cotton Mather's *Magnalia Christi Americana* and the Quandary of Copia, in: *Early American Literature* 39/2 (2004), pp. 263–297.

28 Cotton MATHER, *The Way to Excel. Meditations, Awakened by the Death of the Reverend Mr. Joshua Moody; With some short Character of that Eminent Person [...]*, Boston 1697, quote at p. 5.

29 *Ibid.*, p. 8.

30 *Ibid.*, p. 12.

31 *Ibid.*, p. 13.

32 *Ibid.*, p. 14.

[One may ask] So our *Eating*, our *Drinking*, our *Sleeping*, what is it for? We may distinctly say, *I do this, that I may be supported in the Service of God*. Thus, our *Labours*, our *Travels*, our *Visits*, and our *Exercises of Religion*, we may thus Ennoble them, *I do this, I will do it carefully and cheerfully, because God hath Commended my doing to fit*. A *Dedication of GOD*, is the proper meaning of *Holiness*: And very *Angelical* would be our *Holiness*, if we could be frequent and constant in such Acts of *Dedication*<sup>33</sup>.

Eventually, one's whole life must be dedicated to God and be directed towards Him. Everything one does must be done for God. Finally, the holy lifestyle is also characterised by the fact that »[o]ur continual *Apprehension* of GOD, may produce our continual *Satisfaction* in GOD, under all His *Dispensations*«<sup>34</sup>. Both the good and the bad things are to be taken patiently from God's hand with an appropriate equanimity. A central key phrase for Mather is obedience – obedience to the revealed Word of God, which must be the guide for action in all aspects of life. Holy living can thus be promoted and enacted through the Holy Scriptures.

Dying like all other aspects of life is part of this process and has to be carried out in a certain way. *A Good Man making a Good End* is the title of another funeral sermon published in 1698<sup>35</sup>. A blessed death, as it was, crowns and seals a holy life. Interestingly, Mather also dedicates detailed sections of his Boston funeral writings to the description of the life preceding death, presenting this life not only in a topical, panegyric manner but rather including the challenges, the highs and lows, that this life held in store. The continuous processes of self-examination and sanctification set in motion by the event of conversion remain of course the focal points of the life descriptions. A good character is one who maintains a close walk with God. The demands of the Puritan way of life were very high.

The holy life, which was repeatedly presented in the sermons and their biographical sections, was thought to have prepared the deceased for death. Since he or she had already surrounded themselves with death during their lifetime, a sudden death could not surprise those who lived a holy life. Accordingly, Mather urged his readers and listeners to keep the threat of a sudden death continually in mind. Ideally, preparation for death and sanctification go hand in hand and begin early in life: »Indeed, what should all our *Life* be, but a preparation for *Death*?«<sup>36</sup> In the face of their own carnal sinfulness and the wickedness of the world, Christians must counteract »profanity« through

33 Ibid., p. 14f.

34 Ibid., p. 15.

35 Cotton MATHER, *A Good Man making a Good End. The Life and Death, of the Reverend Mr. John Baily, Comprised and Expressed in a Sermon, On the Day of his Funeral*, Boston 1698.

36 Ibid., p. 20.

their way of life, oriented towards the norms about what is holy. However, this did not mean a separation from the world, but that the Christian should be recognisable as such in a special way through their worldly activities<sup>37</sup>.

In Mather's funeral writings, the colonial context is mostly found in the biographies of the departed, but it is not a central theme therein. Here, the normative sacrality he wanted to convey to his listeners and readers was contested above all by the »world«. All those who did not want to follow the Christian Puritans on their path were considered godless and profane *per se* – in other words, those who could not or would not effectively detach themselves from the sinful, carnal core within them. To reinforce his communicative intentions, Mather often reported in great detail on the exemplary behaviour of the deceased, who thereby revealed themselves as »Saints« and who were to serve as models for the bereaved. In his *Manducatio Ad Ministerium* (1726), a manual for prospective clergy, Mather instructed his readers to put themselves in the shoes of a dying person in order to move forward with their own spiritual renewal process. The historian Sarah Rivett noted: »Mather constructs this exercise as the foundation of experimental philosophy for the Ministers, which ›establishes the proper frame of mind‹ for the promotion and discovery of divine knowledge»<sup>38</sup>. In Mather's view, observing what happens on the deathbed could have an immediate effect on the mind of the observer.

It seemed particularly important to Mather and others that this holy lifestyle was not only practised continuously but above all started as early as possible. In this context, he also liked to make use of writings that the deceased had written themselves in order to make these pious life stories more comprehensible and catchier. Mather's sister Jerusha had died in 1711. Cotton was able to get hands on her written record, which he used extensively in the funeral writing *Memorials of Early Piety*, to compose a religious biography that was both idealistic and vivid, and true to life<sup>39</sup>. In this particular case, he was also able to report from his own memories of his sister.

One event whose centrality in this narrative is unsurprising against the backdrop of Puritan piety is the conversion of Jerusha. This took place when she was twelve years old<sup>40</sup>. However, this was preceded by many encounters

37 Cf. for this concept the classic work by Edmund S. MORGAN, *Visible Saints. The History of a Puritan Idea* [1963], Mansfield Center, CT 2013.

38 Sarah RIVETT, *Tokenography. Narration and the Science of Dying in Puritan Deathbed Testimonies*, in: *Early American Literature* 42/3 (2007), pp. 471–494, at p. 475.

39 Cf. Cotton MATHER, *Memorials of Early Piety. Occurring in the Holy Life & Joyful Death of Mrs. Jerusha Oliver. With Some Account of her Christian Experiences, Extracted from her Reserved Papers: And Published, for the Service of Christianity* [...], Boston 1711.

40 It was quite common to put the process of conversion and the resulting covenant between God and man in writing and also to give it an exact date; Cotton Mather dated Jerusha's to 20 February 1696. Cf., among others Douglas L. WINIARSKI, *Darkness Falls*

and inner conflicts with the Christian faith, which could hardly have been absent in the Mather family<sup>41</sup>. It is justified to quote at length from his conversion account entitled *The Covenant between God & my own Soul*, for it gives a deep insight into the implicit norms of piety of Boston Christians around 1700.

THE Lord has been very Merciful to me; tho' I have been a very Sinful Creature. I have Great Cause to Love and Serve so Gracious a God. What can I do less, than give up my self wholly to the Lord, to be for Him, and not for any other? And, O most Holy Lord God, wilt thou be pleased to Accept of me? Yea, Lord, I know, thou wilt accept me, if I do Sincerely Give my self to Thee in CHRIST. Then, O Lord, I pray thee, for the Sake of the Lord JESUS CHRIST, Be at Peace with me. O Lord, I have fallen from thee, by my Sins, and I am by Nature, a Child of Hell. But thou, O Lord, of thy Infinite Mercy hast offered to be my God. Therefore I come unto thee, and I Renounce my Sins; and, with the Grace inabling me, I will Forsake them. I have been Serving thine Enemies, and Forgetting the God that has dealt very Mercifully with me. But now, O Lord, I will Endeavour to Serve thee; And I will not allow my self in any known Sin; and I will use the Means, which I know, thou hast appointed for the Destruction of my Corruptions. I here give my Heart unto thee; O Lord, I Pray thee to give me a New Heart. And I desire Grace from thee, that when thou shalt call me thereto, I may part with all that is dear unto me in the World, rather than turn from thee to the ways of Sin. O Lord, I have not any Hopes of being Saved upon the account of any Righteousness of my own. I acknowledge, that of my self, I am Helpless and Undone, and without Righteousness. And whereas, thou dost offer to be my God thro' Christ, I do here take the Lord JEHOVAH, Father, Son, and Holy Spirit, for my Portion. And I do give my self Body and Soul, for thy Servant. [...] I put my Neck under thy Yoke, I subscribe to thy Laws as Holy and Just and Good; and I do Promise to take them, as the Rule of my Life<sup>42</sup>.

This passage is very enlightening for the question of the sacralization of certain ways of life. First of all, the reference back to divine grace, through which a holy life was made possible in the first place, was underlined more clearly than it was usually done in funeral sermons. Conversion was usually described as a reorientation of human life. Man was henceforth no longer a

on the Land of Light. *Experiencing Religious Awakenings in Eighteenth-Century New England*, Chapel Hill, NC 2017, pp. 175–206; Erik R. SEEMAN, *Lay Conversion Narratives. Investigating Ministerial Intervention*, in: *New England Quarterly* 71 (1998), pp. 629–634.

41 Cf. Cotton MATHER, *Nepenthes Evangelicum. A brief Essay, Upon A Soul at Ease; In what Piety will bring both Parents and Children to. A Sermon Occasion'd by the Death of a Religious Matron, Mrs. Mary Rock*. [...], Boston 1713, pp. 25–31.

42 MATHER, *Memorials*, pp. 6–8.

slave of the devil but a »servant« of God. And that was a crucial point. From this conversion followed the prospect of a life that followed the laws of God. With conversion, a self-sacralization of the respective individual took place, which only in this way could become a full-fledged member of the Puritan community of faith. It does not necessarily have a calming effect or even lead to a passive attitude on the part of the person, but to a great extent to new and further activities on the part of the convert. From the devilish yoke under the yoke of God, was the motto that spoke from this conversion account and was woven into a success story of Jerusha's life by the preacher. The conversion was also the life-historical trigger that was to lead to the acceptance of the sacralized virtues and behaviours in the individual, as well as the decisive rejection and turning away of their desacralized downsides<sup>43</sup>.

Such written conversion reports also had the function of supporting continuous self-examination and, if necessary, reconsideration as to which virtues should be emulated and which should be eradicated from life. Cotton Mather reported that his sister took the report every year on 20 February, »to Review her COVENANT, and Bewayl her Sins against it, and Fly to the *Blood of the Everlasting Covenant* for the Pardon of them, and Renew her Holy Resolution to Live yet more Watchfully and Fruitfully«<sup>44</sup>. Conversion thus set in motion a process that ideally continued throughout life and intended a continuous improvement and approximation to the example of Jesus Christ. Interestingly, however, Mather also warned against legalism, which could arise as a problematic attitude through entering into such a covenant. One should not forget that it is a »covenant of grace« and not one of works, which is often misunderstood. In his typical manner, Mather thus built a theological argument into his funeral writing and referred to other Puritan authors who, in his view, had expressed themselves convincingly on this question<sup>45</sup>.

We then learn more from Cotton Mather about his sister's practice of piety, which he evidently considered suitable for presenting to his readers with normative intent. Sacralizations of virtues and behaviours could be ascribed particularly convincingly to someone who died blissfully. First, he mentioned her enthusiasm for reading, which had been encouraged by the fact that the deceased had very good eyesight, so that she had been able to read the Bible and other pious texts even in poor lighting conditions. From the notes she had

43 For the importance of conversions cf. e.g., Thomas S. KIDD, *American Colonial History. Clashing Cultures and Faiths*, New Haven/London 2016, pp. 92f., pp. 95–97; Stephen FOSTER, *The Long Argument. English Puritanism and the Shaping of New England Culture, 1570–1700*, Chapel Hill/London 1991, p. 96, pp. 161–163; Jonathan STROM, *Pietist Experiences and Narratives of Conversion*, in: Douglas H. SHANTZ (ed.), *A Companion to German Pietism, 1660–1800*, Leiden/Boston 2015, pp. 293–318.

44 MATHER, *Memorials*, p. 9.

45 Cf. *ibid.*, p. 11.

taken during her pious reading, Mather presented some extracts that he considered valuable for his readers. He also drew the attention of his readers and listeners to a point that was obviously very important to him, namely that the covenant of grace should not lead to a lack of zeal to do good works. This is in some tension with the previous statement that it was a covenant of grace, so it was important not to go to extremes on either side and to be able to evaluate both aspects adequately.

And the first thing, which I will mention, before I Proceed unto any thing else in the World shall be, a Notable Proof, That the Doctrines of *Grace*, have no Tendency to extinguish the *Zeal of Good Works*, and that *Justification* by a *Precious Faith in the Righteousness of God* our Saviour, is not Enemy to the most Conscientious and Elevated *Purity*<sup>46</sup>.

On the contrary, this precious faith gives rise to a zeal for good works and a fervent hostility towards sin. The appeal »keep me from Sin!« must rather be a deeply internalised attitude of a true Christian, which he must exhort himself to many thousands of times in the course of a lifetime, so that he can remain on the path of sanctification. This basic attitude was the first thing one could learn from Jerusha. She regularly set aside times for »self-examination« in order to move forward in this process of purification and sanctification<sup>47</sup>. In addition, her writings shed light on the importance of becoming better hearers of God's Word, both in biblical reading and in preaching. She was very sensitive to the spiritual challenges in her life. Prayer and intercession were other prominent behaviours of Jerusha. When she learned that her brother in England had recovered from an illness, »she poured out her Soul in Praises to the Lord; and in Prayer for that Brother on that Occasion«<sup>48</sup>.

Mather, in his strong emphasis on the holy way of life that would eventually lead to a joyful death, was not alone in stressing this aspect<sup>49</sup>. John Barnard, for example, a fellow Bostonian pastor, pointed to the life of the clergyman George Curwin to emphasise, on the one hand, the great difference between God and man and, on the other hand, the importance of praising God and the

46 Ibid., p. 13f.

47 Cf. *ibid.*, p. 19.

48 Ibid., p. 17.

49 Cf. for instance Benjamin COLMAN, *A Holy & Useful Life Recommended from the Happy End of it. A Sermon Preach'd upon the Death of the Honourable and truly Vertuous Isaac Addington Esqr. [...]*, Boston 1715; Thomas BLOWERS, *The Deaths of Eminent Men, and Excellent Friends, very distressing to the Survivors. Set forth in a Sermon Preacht at Salem-Village [...]. Occasion'd by the Death of the Reverend, Mr. Joseph Green [...]*, Boston 1716.



deep, personal relationship with God that must characterise such a life<sup>50</sup>. And it was generally the case that a great deal was expected of the clergy in terms of their ministry in particular and their lifestyle in general. As has already been shown, the Boston preachers did not shy away from pompous, panegyric rhetoric. The funeral sermon of the pastor Joseph Gerrish opened with the heading »The truest and highest EXCELLENCIES«, followed by the biblical text on which the sermon was to be preached, Proverbs 12:26 »The Righteous is more Excellent than his Neighbour«<sup>51</sup>. In terms of content, the sermon then mainly cited the merits and qualities of such a particularly righteous person. In the process, the boundaries between the actual interpretation of the biblical passage and the reference to the deceased person often became blurred. Based on the aforementioned biblical passage, his teaching summed up the conviction that there must be a fundamental, visible difference between righteous people and others: »A Righteous Man, (or, One of true PIETY) for ever Excels one that is not so, in those Things which will truly make an Excellent Man«<sup>52</sup>.

The basis for this was first and foremost the justifying faith in Jesus Christ, which Mather had also dutifully mentioned first<sup>53</sup>. This alone, however, was not sufficient to correspond to his teaching point, even if it represented a necessary condition for everything else. Rather, it is true that even the most praiseworthy deeds are an abomination before God if a person performs them out of the wrong motives. Good deeds can only be done by those who do them in the knowledge that they can contribute nothing to their righteousness before God<sup>54</sup>. The next point mentioned was the exceptional piety of the deceased: »A Righteous Man is a Pious Man« and in every righteous human being be »a Principle of PIETY; a Principle produced by the Sanctifying Influences of the Holy Spirit«<sup>55</sup>.

Moreover, the departed had already been transformed by the process of rebirth and was a new person, and above all recognisable as such. In his actions it was also comprehensible that he had set the right priorities and put his life of faith before any temptations of earthly existence<sup>56</sup>. Because

50 Cf. John BARNARD, *The Nature and Manner of Man's Blessing GOD; With Our Obligations thereto. A Sermon Preached at Salem [...] after the Death of the Reverend Mr. George Curwin [...]*, Boston 1717.

51 Cotton MATHER, *Detur Digniori. The Righteous Man described & asserted in the Excellent Man; and The Excellencies of such an One demonstrated. In a Sermon, upon the Death of the Reverend Mr. Joseph Gerrish [...]*, Boston 1720, p. 1.

52 *Ibid.*, p. 3.

53 Cf. *ibid.*

54 Cf. *ibid.*, pp. 5f.

55 *Ibid.*, p. 7.

56 Cf. *ibid.*, p. 10.

a *Righteous Man* has the *Art of Living* to GOD, and *Laying hold on Eternal Life*. One so Enumerates the *Seven Liberal Arts* of a Christian; The *Art of Thinking*; The *Art of Speak'ing*; The *Art of Loving*; The *Art of Pray'ing*; The *Art of Wanting*; The *Art of Re'penting*; The *Art of Believing*<sup>57</sup>.

Regardless of whether one wanted to add to the list, it was clear to Mather that the person who had these characteristics could be called an excellent person. This included, as he repeatedly emphasised, doing good. »Is it not an *Excellent Thing to Do Good?*«, can only be understood as a rhetorical question; they are also helpful, he said, because through their deeds just people can be distinguished from unjust people<sup>58</sup>.

What Mather had in mind here, he described elsewhere a little later as »Genuine Christianity«, which had to emerge both in life and in death<sup>59</sup>. In this writing, he also emphasised that the true Christian does not live for his own sake. This meant first of all that he did not place himself at the centre of his activities and efforts but »something Higher than thy own Advantage must be aimed at«<sup>60</sup>. Second, the same applies to love, which should not only refer to itself. Only in this way is it possible to become a good and just person<sup>61</sup>. Third, the denial of the self must permeate the whole life of a Christian. It is not one's own will that should be decisive, but rather a complete submission to the will of Christ is to be demanded of the Christian.

Be willing to cross *thy self*, and bear the Cross, when thou findest *thy self* inclined unto any thing that thy SAVIOUR will have to be denied unto thee: Be willing to see *thy self* without such Things, as thy SAVIOUR will deny unto thee. Yea, There is a *Righteous* as well as a *Corrupt*, SELF, to be renounced<sup>62</sup>.

A Christian must therefore dedicate his life to the Lord. The Christian must take great care to please God. The guideline on this path is the Word of God: »The *Will* of thy SAVIOUR, Oh! Let it always Govern thee. *Walk according to this Rule*, that *Peace* may be upon thee«<sup>63</sup>. *Virtue in it's Verdure* was the title

57 Ibid., p. 15.

58 Cf. *ibid.*, pp. 16–19, quote on p. 16.

59 Cf. Cotton MATHER, *Genuine Christianity. Or, A True Christian Both in Life and in Death, Glorifying the most Glorious Lord. A Sermon On the Departure of Mrs. Frances Webb, The Vertuous Consort of Mr. John Webb [...]*, Boston 1721.

60 Ibid., p. 9.

61 Cf. *ibid.*, p. 10: »And hence, when he deals with *Others*, he should not be for Engrossing all the *Benefit* unto *Himself*; but be willing that his Neighbours as well as *Himself*, may fare the *Better* for his Dealing with them«.

62 Ibid.

63 Ibid., p. 12. Cf. also Cotton MATHER, *A Good Character. Or, A Walk with GOD Characterized. With Some Dubs paid unto the Memory of Mr. Joseph Belcher, The late*

of a late epitaph by Cotton Mather from 1725. For him, virtue and spiritual growth belonged very closely together<sup>64</sup>. Such a way of life could also protect against the imponderables and uncertainties associated with human death. Sanctification consequently served in a striking way for the preparation of death and as protection against a sudden, unusual way of dying<sup>65</sup>. This connection was then also emphasised in the funeral sermons on Cotton Mather; he had been a Christian who had walked in a particularly close way with God and had served Him in a variety of energetic ways<sup>66</sup>.

#### 4. Puritan Sacrality contested: Examples from Experience *Mayhews Indian Converts (1727)*

The normative sacrality that the Puritans articulated and tried to convey, was challenged by the missionary situation under colonial conditions, which this section will address by referring to the example of the »Praying Indians« located on Martha's Vineyard, or Noepe, as it was called by the Native Americans who lived there<sup>67</sup>. »Praying Indians« was a missionary reference to the Wampanoag, who not only played an important role in the making of the Thanksgiving ritual<sup>68</sup>, but were also famous for their »Praying Towns«<sup>69</sup>, a

Reverend & Excellent Pastor [...], Boston 1723 and Cottons Funeral Sermon for his father Increase, COTTON MATHER, *A Father Departing. A Sermon On the Departure of the Venerable and Memorable Dr. Increase Mather [...]*, Boston 1723.

64 Cf. COTTON MATHER, *Virtue in it's Verdure. A Christian Exhibited as a Green Olivetree, In the House of GOD; With a Character of the Virtuous Mrs. Abigail Brown [...]*, Boston 1725.

65 Cf. COTTON MATHER, *Euthanasia. A Sudden Death Made Happy and Easy to the Dying Believer. Exemplified in John Frizell, Esq; [...]*, Boston 1723, for instance p. 13, 24. Charles Chauncy puts a different emphasis on the vanity of human life and thus places the focus more on God's saving action than on what man has to do or not do, cf. CHARLES CHAUNCY, *Man's Life considered under the Similitude of a Vapour, that appeareth for a little Time, and then vanisheth away. A Sermon on the Death of that Honorable & Vertuous Gentlewoman Mrs. Sarah Byfield [...]*, Boston 1731.

66 Cf. Benjamin COLMAN, *The Holy Walk and Glorious Translation of Blessed Enoch. A Sermon Preaced at the Lecture in Boston, Two Days after the DEATH of the Reverend and Learned Cotton Mather [...]*, Boston 1728; William van ARRAGON, *The Glorious Translation of an American Elijah. Mourning Cotton Mather in 1728*, in: Reiner SMOLINSKI / Jan STIEVERMANN (eds.), *Cotton Mather and Biblia Americana. America's First Bible Commentary. Essays in Reappraisal*, Grand Rapids, MI 2011, pp. 61–82.

67 For an overview cf. Heike BUNGERT, *Die Indianer. Geschichte der indigenen Nationen in den USA*, Munich 2020.

68 Cf. David SILVERMAN, *This Land is their Land. The Wampanoag Indians, Plymouth Colony, and the Troubled History of Thanksgiving*, New York 2020.

69 Cf. for instance Neal SALISBURY, *Red Puritans. The »Praying Indians« of Massachusetts Bay and John Eliot*, in: *William and Mary Quarterly* 31/1 (1974), pp. 27–54; James P. RONDA, *Generations of Faith. The Christian Indians of Martha's Vineyard*, in: *William and Mary Quarterly* 38/3 (1981), pp. 369–394.

puritan description for settlements in which mainly Native Americans, who had become Christians, lived. On this island, the Puritan missionary efforts were perceived by them as relatively successful, as they were relatively permanent. Experience Mayhew, whose »*Indian Converts*« writing is an important source for that history, was already a third-generation missionary there.

Mayhew's work was mainly aimed at demonstrating the successes of the missionary efforts to the international, mostly English donors of the Society for the Propagation of the Gospel in Foreign Parts<sup>70</sup>. Interestingly, these successes were specifically demonstrated through the lives and deaths of Native Americans. Mayhew's writing can provide insights into the functioning of sanctification as a strategy of missionizing others and oneself as well as Puritan self-sacralization. After Mayhew's preface, in which he explains his missionary approach, there is also an *Attestation by the United Ministers of Boston*, presumably written by Cotton Mather, which provides some insight into their perspective on Native Americans. »*Most certainly, to humanize the Miserable, which our first English Planters found surviving the wasting Plagues which had so swept away the Indians, as to make room for a better People; to cicurate [i. e. tame, BB] and civilize them was a Task of no little Difficulty*«<sup>71</sup>. Improvement of the condition for those who have not been swept away by plagues can only be for those who respond positively to the Puritan civilising mission. The clergymen depict the lives of the Native Americans in gloomy terms. As »heathens« there is nothing sacred in them<sup>72</sup>. Christianity is in their opinion the only thing that can beget sacrality.

Mayhew, then, divided his narratives into four separate groups: Godly Ministers, other Good men, religious Women and pious young Persons. Under these four categories we find descriptions of Native American Christian Lives and their challenges. Mayhew portrays the people chosen for his narrative as those accepted by the divine grace of God. This acceptance has transformed their lives. He explains, that

it appears to me on divers Accounts necessary at this time, that it be made yet more plainly to appear, that the *Grace of GOD, which bringeth Salvation* to Sinners, hath effectually appeared to some of these, *teaching them to deny all Ungodliness and worldly Lusts, and to live soberly, righteously, and godly in the World*<sup>73</sup>.

70 Cf. Ulrike KIRCHBERGER, *Konversion zur Moderne? Die britische Indianermission in der atlantischen Welt des 18. Jahrhunderts*, Wiesbaden 2008, pp. 51–64.

71 [Cotton MATHER and others], *An Attestation by The United Ministers of Boston*, in: Experience Mayhew, *Indian Converts: or. Some Account of the Lived and Dying Speeces of a considerable Number of the Christianized Indians of Martha's Vineyard [...]*, London 1727, p. XV.

72 Cf. Kathryn Gin LUM, *Heathens. Religion and Race in American History*, Cambridge, MA 2022.

73 MAYHEW, *Converts*, p. XX.

By the grace of God, Native Americans should also be able to live in a way that corresponded to the demands made on the rest of »civilised« people. This reminds of the idea of a »shared humanity«. Native Americans, as human beings, need salvation, but they also are meant and addressed by the salvatory work of Christ. For this reason, this category of difference can remain in the background in this case, because through God's grace, their lives could also be sacralized. At the same time, however, he clearly stated that he considered Indians as very sinful people: »*Iniquity does abound among them, and the Love of many waxeth old*«<sup>74</sup>. In his opinion, they had a particularly long way to go before one could speak of a holy life. It would be clear, however, that a decision in favour of Christianity had to be visibly manifest. Conversion, which was also an important component of the funerary writings, is to be seen as the key point here. Whether a conversion was to be regarded as successful, however, depended on the individual's way of life and how they died in the end<sup>75</sup>.

It is probably no coincidence that Mayhew begins the biographical narratives with a particularly prominent example, a sachem of the Wampanoag tribe named Hiacoomes. Hiacoomes was the first of the Wampanoag to be converted by Thomas Mayhew, Experience's grandfather, in the early 1640s<sup>76</sup>. God, in his marvellous grace, had »called him *out of Darkness into his marvellous Light*: and having now had a Taste of that Knowledge of God and Christ, which is Life eternal, he was resolved that nothing should hinder him from labouring still higher Attainments in it«<sup>77</sup>. Hiacoomes had not been dissuaded from this path by his countrymen who bullied him, nor by the terrible adversities in his personal life. After having proven himself over several years, he was ordained to be one of the ministers of the »Praying Indians«. The account of his life states: »As *Hiacoomes* was a good *Christian*, so he was doubtless a good *Minister*, and herein his being a *godly man* was more evident«<sup>78</sup>. When some of his tribe threatened him with their magic, he said that no magic could do anything against the almighty God of the Christians, which made a great impression<sup>79</sup>. Here, then, a clear line was drawn by an Indian Christian. In this world, only the Christian God could become active and, above all, offer effective protection against the »false gods«. The actions that white Puritans

74 Ibid., p. XXI.

75 Cf. Kristina BROSS, *Dying Saints, Vanishing Savages. »Dying Indian Speeches« in Colonial New England Literature*, in: *Early American Literature* 36/3 (2001), pp. 325–352. For the European precedents to these ideas cf. Austra REINIS, *Reforming the Art of Dying. The ars moriendi in the German Reformation (1519–1528)*, Aldershot 2007; David W. ATKINSON, *The English ars moriendi. Its Protestant Transformation*, in: *Renaissance and Reformation* 6 (1982), pp. 1–10.

76 Cf. MAYHEW, *Converts*, pp. 1–12.

77 Ibid., p. 3.

78 Ibid., p. 8.

79 Cf. *ibid.*, p. 6.

considered to have no place in the life of a Christian could be eliminated in the course of self-sacralization. Where this supposedly happened, Mayhew's narratives recording it functioned as a normative transmission of such behaviours.

His exemplary Christianity was also reflected in the way he dealt with death. For example, not even the death of two of his children made him question his faith, instead he expressed hope that he would see them again in heaven<sup>80</sup>. Mayhew joyfully reports that the death ritual of his children remained completely free of »Indian« elements: »At the Funeral there were no black Faces or Goods buried, or howling over the dead, as the manner of the *Indians* in those Times was; but instead thereof a patient Resignation«<sup>81</sup>. The report also records a funeral sermon, which was delivered by Hiacoomes at the grave of a fellow minister. Mayhew emphasises that Hiacoomes was until the end of his life an exemplary Christian. At the end of the narrative of Hiacoomes' life Mayhew states: »In his last Sickness, he breathed forth many pious Expressions, and gave good Exhortations to all about him, and so went into Eternal Rest«<sup>82</sup>.

In this life description, Mayhew sacralizes the lifestyle of an exemplary »Indian« clergyman who had – in his view – been completely stripped of the traits of his cultural upbringing and had supposedly fully embraced the premises of the Puritans. To be sure, this was an idealised narrative. Mayhew's writing played a central role in obliterating the Native Americans' own cultural heritage. The descriptions of his character and way of life correspond as far as possible to those of other funeral writings, which were analysed above. Mayhew does not propose, therefore, a culturally sensitive treatment of the »Other« saint. Rather, the values of the Native Americans concerning death and mourning are radically degraded and deleted. Sacralities were mutually contested, although we only have, in this example, one side of the story<sup>83</sup>.

When reading Mayhew against the grain, however, it becomes clear that his ideas of sacrality have been contested and fought against to a great extent by Native Americans. Erik Seeman has pointed to deathbed narratives in Mayhew that he has called »unorthodox«, but which shed light on the continuing validity of approaches towards the Sacred among Native Americans<sup>84</sup>. In *Indian Converts* there are frequent reports of dreams and spirit apparitions, which we

80 Cf. *ibid.*, pp. 7f.

81 *Ibid.*, p. 7.

82 *Ibid.*, pp. 12.

83 I argue against the more sympathetic view of Hilary E. Wyss, »Things that do accompany Salvation«. Colonialism, Conversion, and Cultural Exchange in Experience Mayhew's Indian Converts, in: *Early American Literature* 33/1 (1998), pp. 39–61, especially on pp. 45f.

84 Cf. SEEMAN, *Deathbed*, pp. 18f.

can hardly ever find in Mather, for example. Spirits were a central aspect of the beliefs of the Native Americans, as we also know from other sources<sup>85</sup>. The deathbed report of a certain Abigail, whose Indian name appears to have been Ammapoo mentions such a spirit apparition. Her daughter, who was with her at the deathbed, is reported to have experienced the following:

as she sat in the Room drowsy, with her Eyes well nigh shut, she suddenly saw a Light which seemed to her brighter than that of Noon-day; when looking up, she saw two bright shining Persons, standing in white raiment at her Mother's bed-side, who, on her Sight of them, with the Light attending them, immediately disappeared; and that hereupon saying something to her Mother of what she had seen, she replied, *This is what I said to you, God taketh Care of me*<sup>86</sup>.

This event and the interpretation of the dying mother should have a special effect due to the previously given hint that she died only after a long, severe illness and remained faithful to the Christian religion during all this time. This death then is described entirely according to the Christian pattern<sup>87</sup>. In this case, Mayhew affirmed the validity and credibility of these remarks by saying that he had known the deceased himself and had esteemed her as »a very godly Woman«<sup>88</sup>.

David Silverman has worked out in various studies that the missionary efforts on Martha's Vineyard can be seen as comparatively cautious and were carried above all by the efforts to respond to the religious background of the Native Americans and to translate culturally in a way that promoted Christianity<sup>89</sup>. The analytical questioning of processes of sacralization and desacralization can add another dimension to these exchanges between missionaries and Native Americans, whereby agency is attributed to both sides<sup>90</sup>. As historian Gregory Michna has recently shown, it was indeed a »long road to

85 Cf. David J. SILVERMAN, *Faith and Boundaries. Colonists, Christianity, and Community among the Wampanoag Indians of Martha's Vineyard, 1600–1871*, Cambridge 2007, pp. 26–33.

86 MAYHEW, *Converts*, p. 150.

87 Cf. *ibid.*: »She, just before she departed this Life, prayed earnestly to God for all her Children and Offspring, as her first Husband did before he dy'd; nor dir she now forget to pray for others also, and even for her Enemies. And having thus called on the Lord, she presently after committed her Soul into the Hands of her Redeemer, and so expired«.

88 *Ibid.*, p. 151.

89 Cf. David J. SILVERMAN, *Indians, Missionaries, and Religious Translation. Creating Wampanoag Christianity in Seventeenth-Century Martha's Vineyard*, in: William and Mary Quarterly 62/2 (2005), pp. 141–174; *id.*, *Red Brethren. The Brothertown and Stockbridge Indians and the Problem of Race in Early America*, Ithaca/London 2010.

90 Cf. Elise M. BRENNER, *To Pray or to be Prey: That is the Question. Strategies for Cultural Autonomy of Massachusetts Praying Town Indians*, in: *Ethnohistory* 27/2 (1980),

sainthood« that Native Americans had to endure<sup>91</sup>. For an even better understanding of this road, a more detailed analysis of the publication *Indian Converts* will admittedly be necessary, the usefulness of which should, however, be made probable by the present contribution. What can be stated, in any case, is that sanctification was a means for the Puritans to collectively sacralize themselves, which was to be ostentatiously affirmed when they encountered the Native Americans' ideas of sacredness. However, their conversion was not infrequently also a step of self-empowerment that enabled them to belong to the Christian community. Other discriminatory and exclusionary facts that very much shaped the period under consideration here, especially issues of race and gender, are conspicuously in the background in the sources analysed here<sup>92</sup>. Probably because they did not correspond to the normative intentions of the authors.

## 5. Conclusion

Clearly, the things that were sacred to Puritans and Native Americans were mutually contradicted and questioned by both, despite the asymmetrical source situation and despite the unequally distributed power between Mayhew and the Wampanoags. The access via the »deathways« illustrates the manifold tensions accompanying ideas of sacredness in colonial New England around 1700. The study of these »deathways« can make the different aspects of the »boundary work« between sacred and profane more comprehensible and provide it with more analytical depth<sup>93</sup>. It is possible that the accounts of Experience Mayhew are particularly well suited to providing the debate on the »ambiguity of the sacred« with a meaningful historical case study that could be used to explore the potential of this conceptual idea<sup>94</sup>.

pp. 135–152 and Kenneth M. MORRISON, Discourse and the Accomodation of Values. Toward a Revision of Mission History, in: *Journal of the American Academy of Religion* 53/3 (1985), pp. 365–382.

91 Cf. Gregory MICHNA, The Long Road to Sainthood: Indian Christians, the Doctrine of Preparation, and the Halfway Covenant of 1662, in: *Church History* 89/1 (2020), pp. 43–73.

92 Cf. for instance Wendy WARREN, *New England Bound. Slavery and Colonization in Early America*, New York 2017; Christina SNYDER, *Slavery in Indian Country. The Changing Face of Captivity in Early America*, Cambridge, MA 2010 and most importantly Linford D. FISHER, *The Indian Great Awakening. Religion and the Shaping of Cultures in Early America*, Oxford/New York 2012.

93 Cf. SILVERMAN, Faith, and for the concept Keith P. LURIA, *Sacred Boundaries: Religious Coexistence and Conflict in Early Modern France*, Washington 2005.

94 Cf. Dmitry KURAKIN, Reassembling the Ambiguity of the Sacred. A Neglected Inconsistency in Readings of Durkheim, in: *Journal of Classical Sociology* 15/4 (2015),



Puritans, and especially puritan missionaries, had to constantly reassure themselves about what they considered sacred, which way of life they considered rightful, which customs and rites they approved of, and which transcendental ideas they agreed upon. We can, therefore, understand sacralization efforts with good reasons in such a sense that a certain way of life was to be made absolute, inviolable, and order-defining. However, we also have to recognise that the persistence of »worldly«-immanent counter-concepts led to ever new efforts and attempts at explanation on their part. Analytically, putting processes of sacralization and desacralization into the centre could help to further deepen our understanding of the encounters and conflicts in colonial New England.

pp. 377–395; Alexander T. RILEY, »Renegade Durkheimianism« and the Transgressive Left Sacred, in: Jeffrey C. ALEXANDER/ Philip SMITH (eds.), *The Cambridge Companion to Durkheim*, Cambridge 2005, pp. 274–304.



Alessandro Grazi

## Questioning the Canon

Prayer Books and Jewish Reform in Nineteenth-Century Italy

The concept of »sacrality« and the dimension of the »sacred« have played a central role both in ancient and in post-temple Judaism, as testified by prominent key concepts like »Holy Land«, »Holy Scriptures« or »Holy Language«. In spite of that, Jewish Studies have confronted the theme of sacralization and desacralization mainly without using this specific terminology, but with other terms. If we consider post-temple Judaism, when the increasingly diasporic conditions forced the Jews to bind their tradition to a corpus of sacred texts, the term »canonization« has been used as a synonym for sacralization. Indeed, as far as scriptural religions are concerned, canonization consists of the compilation of normatively valid sacred texts and constitutes a central element of religious sacralization practices<sup>1</sup>. In fact, a large part of the Jewish intellectual activity has been devoted to establishing the legitimacy of extra-biblical practices or, in our terms, the sacralization of previously non-sacred practices and texts. This gradual work of expansion of the realm of the sacred has eventually come to include the so-called oral Torah, constituted by all the rabbinic wisdom of the Talmud<sup>2</sup> and other canonical texts of rabbinic literature.

This search for »legitimization« has been led by the question famously posed by the Harvard scholar Jay Harris: »How do we know this?«, which, through the use of textual criticism and exegesis, aimed at legitimizing (sacralizing) extra-biblical practices<sup>3</sup>. This expansion of the (textual) domain of the sacred had continued until the 6th century CE, when the Talmud basically reached

- 1 Petra BAHR, *Kanon/Kanonisierung*, in: Metzler Lexikon Religion, ed. by Christoph AUFFARTH et al., Stuttgart 1999, pp. 159–161, URL: <[https://doi.org/10.1007/978-3-476-03703-9\\_55](https://doi.org/10.1007/978-3-476-03703-9_55)> (06-01-2023); Mirja KUTZER / Ilse MUELLNER, *Heilige Texte – eine Hinführung*, in: KUTZER et al. (eds.), *Heilige Texte – Verständigungen zwischen Theologie und Kulturwissenschaft*, Stuttgart 2023, pp. 9–17.
- 2 The Talmud is the central text of Rabbinic Judaism and the main source of Jewish religious legislation (*Halachah*) and Jewish theology. It is the central canonical text of Judaism.
- 3 Jay M. HARRIS, *How do we know this? Midrash and the Fragmentation of Modern Judaism*, Albany 1995, pp. 1–3.

its crystallized form<sup>4</sup>. Instead, as far as liturgy is concerned, the same historical epoch lay the oral and structural foundations of the future prayer book, which developed into an authoritative written form only around the ninth and tenth centuries CE, corresponding to the widespread diffusion of the codex in the Jewish world<sup>5</sup>, as we will see in more detail. However, although the appearance of a written prayer book promoted canonization and determined a certain stability in its general structure and content, accretions, deletions, and even major changes in the order of the prayers occurred throughout the entire Middle Ages. Only the invention of printing helped crystallize its text, which anyways kept undergoing minor changes and text amendments until the 19th century<sup>6</sup>.

Indeed, the 19th century witnessed some major modifications of the prayer book. The rise of the Jewish Reform movement created a schism with Orthodoxy and, by undermining rabbinical Judaism<sup>7</sup>, challenged the domain of the sacred. As a reaction to the propositions of the Reform movement, Orthodox rabbis fought to maintain the dimension of the sacred intact, but partially »succumbed« to the *Zeitgeist* and implemented their own modifications of this realm<sup>8</sup>. The performative domain of liturgy developed into an important battlefield of these competing claims of Orthodox and Reform Judaism. This quarrel manifested itself in the modification and drafting of prayer books and in other liturgical changes.

In this chapter, I am going to explore some of the attempts at redefining core elements of the sacred within the Jewish tradition, as reflected in modifications to the prayer book (*Siddur*)<sup>9</sup> and other textual additions to the liturgy in nineteenth-century Italy. These liturgical changes were partly stimulated by Judaism's general encounter with modernity and, more in particular, by the schism between Reform and Orthodox Judaism, and partly driven by contingent events, such as the outbreak of epidemics. Nineteenth-century Italy is a particularly suitable setting for such an analysis, as the competing claims of Reform and Orthodoxy interacted with substantial sociocultural changes Italian Jews underwent during the so-called age of civil emancipation. This encounter with modernity had a deep impact particularly on the Italian

4 On the Talmud and the crystallization of Rabbinic literature see the classic Günter STEMBERGER, *Einleitung in Talmud und Midrasch*, München 1992.

5 Stefan C. REIF, *Judaism and Hebrew Prayer. New Perspectives in Jewish liturgical history*, Cambridge 1993, p. 128.

6 *Ibid.*, pp. 131–207.

7 On the Jewish Reform Movement see Michael MEYER, *Response to Modernity. A History of the Reform Movement in Judaism*, Oxford 1998.

8 REIF, *Judaism*, p. 17.

9 The *Siddur* is used on a daily basis, while the *Machzor*, a very similar prayer book, is specifically used during the High Holidays. In this contribution, I will refer to the *Siddur*.

Jewry, which was mainly Orthodox. Their multifaceted process of integration in majority society across the civil emancipation period is not directly the object of this chapter, as it would require a long and complex discussion, which would digress from this contribution's main topic<sup>10</sup>. Nevertheless, in addition to the discussion on canonization as sacralization, this chapter will also show the direct link canonization and processes of integration and assimilation, by using the concept of »Chukkot Ha-Goyim«<sup>11</sup> or »imitation of the Gentile«. In fact, the Italian Jews' strategies of adaptation to majority Italian society included modifications of the liturgy, also as a reaction to proposed innovations by the Reform movement.

This contribution understands contestations over and modifications of the prayer book as contests over canonization, i. e., the inclusion of certain elements within a prayer book that has, in the course of centuries, attained to status of comprising authoritative and obliging texts for Jewish liturgical practice. Which additions or removals of prayers from the liturgy have been made and how can we make sense of them in the light of Jewish reform and social change? In attempting to answer this question, I will mostly address dynamics of contestation between Reform and Orthodoxy, as they were the main promoters of liturgical change, but also other circumstantial liturgical modifications, as the publication of prayers against epidemics, as they can help us attempt to answer this question. In order to better understand the dynamics of liturgical change in nineteenth-century Italy, it is necessary to describe its geo-political context, particularly in relation to its Jewry.

## 1. The Italian context: Reform projects in Italian Judaism

In the 19th century, Italian Jewry was characterized by a strong fragmentation and by the small size of its many communities, scattered throughout the peninsula in the several small States, which became unified as a country in 1861. In each pre-unification State, Jewish communities underwent at times radically different legislation, determining strongly diverging socio-economic conditions. This, in turn, caused different organizational forms of the communities themselves and in relation to the central authority. Concretely, this geo-political fragmentation also favored a diversity of relationships with the

<sup>10</sup> A recent comprehensive overview on the historiography on the Italian Jews' process of integration in Italian society with a discussion on the relevant terminology can be found in Alessandro GRAZI, *Prophet of Renewal. David Levi: a Jewish Freemason and Saint-Simonian in Nineteenth-century Italy*, Leiden / Boston 2022, pp. 1–22.

<sup>11</sup> For this and all the following transliterations of Hebrew terms, I have opted for a more readable and less technical transliteration for the sake of a non-specialist readership.

surrounding Catholic majority and even different perspectives on Judaism itself<sup>12</sup>. In a word, we cannot paint nineteenth-century Italian Jews with a single brush. As far as the small demographical size of Italian Jewry as a whole and of its single communities is concerned, the communities of Rome and Livorno contended the primacy of Italy's largest single community, with a number of members fluctuating between about 4,000 and 5,000. In 1861, the Jewish population of the peninsula was just short of 40,000 people over a total Italian population of about 26,000,000, that is, less than 0.2 % of the total population<sup>13</sup>. In addition to this geopolitical fragmentation there is also a diversification of Jewish groups. If the main group was formed by the so-called »Italkim«, the »original« Italian Jews, now present on the peninsula for more than 2,000 years, we have also a significant presence of Sephardim and Ashkenazim<sup>14</sup>.

Unlike previous scholarship, current studies on Italian Jews are problematizing the object of their investigations, by addressing precisely this fragmentation<sup>15</sup>. Older scholarship tended to see Italian Jews as exceptional under several viewpoints, due to an imprecise approach that essentially considered them as a monolithic block<sup>16</sup>. This exceptionalism turned out to be a myth<sup>17</sup>, exactly because it did not address the Italian Jews' diversity and geo-political fragmentation.

Nevertheless, even these new approaches have addressed this fragmentation mostly from either a geo-political viewpoint or from a cultural one. A systematic or comparative analysis of the interactions among other Jewish groups composing Italian Jewry is still lacking. For instance, there is hardly any comparative investigation among the three cultural-linguistic nuclei present on the peninsula – Ashkenazim, Sephardim, and Italkim –, nor on the dynamics between Orthodox and Reform, particularly relevant for this chapter. The

12 Alessandro GRAZI, *Divergent Jewish approaches to Italian nationalism and nation-building*, in: *Annali d'Italianistica* 36 (2018), pp. 261–282; Gadi LUZZATTO VOGHERA, *Aspetti della cultura ebraica in Italia nel secolo XIX*, in: Corrado VIVANTI (ed.), *Gli Ebrei in Italia*, Turin 1997, pp. 1215–1244.

13 Sergio DELLA PERGOLA, *Precursori, convergenti, emarginati. Trasformazioni demografiche degli ebrei in Italia, 1870–1945*, in: Ministero per i beni culturali e ambientali, Ufficio centrale per i beni archivistici (ed.), *Italia Judaica – Gli ebrei nell'Italia unita (1870–1945)*, Rome 1993, pp. 48–81, at p. 71.

14 Sephardim and Ashkenazim are the two main Jewish groups existing in Europe but by no means the only ones. Roughly speaking, the Sephardim are the Jews originating in Iberian peninsula, while the Ashkenazim are the Jews originating in Eastern and Central Europe, up to the Netherlands.

15 GRAZI, *Divergent*; LUZZATTO VOGHERA, *Aspetti*.

16 Attilio MILANO, *Storia degli Ebrei in Italia*, Turin 1963; ROTH, *The History*.

17 Anna FOA, *Il mito dell'assimilazione. La storiografia sull'Emancipazione degli ebrei italiani: prospettive e condizionamenti*, in: *Storia e problemi contemporanei* 45 (2007), pp. 17–29.

lack of examination of the presence of Reform projects in the Italian peninsula determined an important misconception, which postulates that Italian Jews practically did not have a reform movement like the prominent German one<sup>18</sup>. As Italian Judaism was predominantly Orthodox, it has been taken for granted that Orthodoxy was its only manifestation. The inappropriately monolithic view of Italian Jews has also not helped in the case of this assessment and in the study of the reform projects present in the peninsula. Past scholarship has asked why there was no Reform movement in Italy instead of asking whether there was one and which forms it took. One common answer that has been given to this question is that Italian Jews were not prone to reform, due to the influence of the overwhelmingly Catholic majority society<sup>19</sup>. Another answer that was provided is that the Italian Jews' condition was already so positive that they apparently did not need a reform to adapt to the instances of modernity<sup>20</sup>. Considering that certain elements typical of the German Reform movement – such as the use of the vernacular in the synagogue service or fostering the study of the »secular subjects« within a traditional Jewish education – had already been part of Italian Jewish life for a long time, Italian Jews allegedly did not need reform<sup>21</sup>. In spite of the fact that each of these reasons contains elements of truth, the Italian peninsula actually hosted several reform projects, as the Israeli scholar Asher Salah has very recently demonstrated<sup>22</sup>. If it is true, according to Salah, that Italy did not have a full-fledged and organized Reform movement, it is however false that Reform attempts did not take place in the Italian peninsula. In the same article, Salah illustrates the reform propositions of a number of prominent Italian Jewish intellectuals, both lay people and Rabbis, in order to show that in Italy, too, there was a cultural terrain, on which reform instances could actually develop<sup>23</sup>. Reform projects embraced the whole spectrum of Jewish life, from *Halachah* (Jewish legislature) to liturgy, from social customs to education. Here, I will only focus on the liturgical aspects and, more in particular, on the textual dimension of the prayer books.

18 Here the German Reform movement is mentioned not so much as a term of comparison for the Italian reform instances, but because it was the first Reform movement in Judaism and, as such, attracted a large number of studies and is often the point of reference, when discussing reform projects in other contexts. Among the scholars, who postulated a practical non-existence of a reformed Judaism in Italy see MEYER, *Response to Modernity*, p. 174; Cecil ROTH, *The History of the Jews of Italy*, Philadelphia 1946, pp. 444f.

19 MEYER, *Response to Modernity*, p. 163.

20 MILANO, *Storia degli Ebrei*, p. 174.

21 ROTH, *The History*, pp. 444f.

22 Asher SALAH, *Jewish Reform in 19th Century Italy*, in: *Filosofia Italiana* 1 (2020), pp. 111–139.

23 *Ibid.*

Aaron Fernandes (1761–1828), a lay intellectual from Livorno, was the first Italian Jew to propose a comprehensive reform of Italian Judaism, through the publication of a pamphlet illustrating his ideas already in 1810. In liturgical terms, however, Fernandes only suggested some exterior changes that, in his view, distinguished the Jewish population from their non-Jewish compatriots too much, such as the abolition of *Tefillin*<sup>24</sup> and *Tzizit* (ritual fringes) or the sound of the *Shofar* (ritual ram's horn) on *Rosh Hashannah* (Jewish New Year's)<sup>25</sup>. Fernandes' ideas were then repropounded later in the 1840s by Sabatino Sacerdoti, another lay intellectual from Parma<sup>26</sup>.

With the same purposes, the prominent reformer Salvatore Anau (1807–1847) of Ferrara supported some substantial performative changes of Jewish liturgy around the key year of 1848, such as the inclusion of women in the synagogue worship, the introduction of an organ, the use of Italian in sermons but also more radical reforms, such as the acceptance of intermarriage<sup>27</sup>.

Moisè Soave (1820–1882), a schoolteacher from Venice, anonymously published a pamphlet delineating a radical project of Jewish Reform in Italy in 1865, which proposed, amongst other things, a substantial shortening of the prayers, the addition of the organ in synagogues, and the acceptance of women during worship<sup>28</sup>.

These lay supporters of reform were not the only ones. There was also a sizeable number of rabbis, who were in favor of substantial modifications of the liturgy. Among them, Salomone Olper of Venice (1811–1877), who unsuccessfully attempted to remove the days of *Chol Ha-Moed*, the weekdays of the festivals, in his community, but did manage to allow women to complete a *minyan*<sup>29</sup> and to abolish the *Chalitzah*, the tradition of the levirate marriage, that is, of marrying one brother's widow; or Daniele Pergola (1830–1910) of Pitigliano, who drafted the most radical project of Jewish Reform in Italy (1877), in which he, too, promoted a shortening of the prayers and a total elimination of each prayer referring to Zion and to messianic times<sup>30</sup>.

24 In English *Tefillin* are also called phylacteries. They consist of small black leather boxes with containing scrolls with verses from the Pentateuch. *Tefillin* are worn by adult Jews during weekday morning prayers.

25 On Aaron Fernandes see Donata GIGLIO, Tra rivoluzione ed emarginazione. Il caso di Aron Fernandez, in: Livio ANTONIELLI et al. (eds.), *Per Marino Berengo*, Milan 2000, p. 707 and SALAH, *Jewish Reform*, pp. 113–117.

26 *Ibid.*, p. 117.

27 On Salvatore Anau see Andrew M. CANEPA, Emancipation and Jewish Response in Mid-Nineteenth-Century Italy, in: *European History Quarterly* 16/4 (1986), pp. 403–439, at pp. 421–423 and SALAH, *Jewish Reform*, pp. 117–119.

28 On Moisè Soave see Gadi LUZZATTO VOGHERA, Cenni sulla presenza ebraica a Venezia durante la dominazione austriaca, in: Gino BENZONI/ Gaetano COZZI (eds.), *Venezia e l'Austria*, Milan 1999, pp. 195–212 and SALAH, *Jewish Reform*, pp. 120f.

29 Quorum of ten adult Jewish men valid for communal worship.

30 On these reformist Rabbis see SALAH, *Jewish Reform*, pp. 119–124.



This widespread support for reform instances shows how in Italy, too, there was fertile ground, on which reform proposals could emerge and develop. However, it is important to keep in mind that only some of these projects or single instances were put into practice. The first institutional implementations of Reform proposals in Italy took place rather late, at least compared with Germany. In 1869 the community of Alessandria, in Piedmont, north-western Italy, temporarily split over a reduction of the prayers' length, in which the Rabbi De Veali and the most Orthodox part of the community did not accept such shortenings but were finally forced to accept them in 1870. In the same years, we have the foundation of the first officially reformed temple in Nice, which was an Italian territory until 1860. This reformed temple was established alongside the Orthodox synagogue; Nice was followed by Padua in 1875 and by Asti in 1889. There, the prayers were recited by the Cantor only and the *Birkat Ha-Kohanim*, the priestly blessing, was entirely abolished<sup>31</sup>.

As this brief survey shows, Jewish reform projects were localized, divergent, implemented in various degrees, and usually contested and countered by Orthodox Jews in the respective cities and communities. Three areas in particular can be identified in which Reformers and Orthodoxy negotiated over the core elements and values of Judaism. First, reformers proposed modifications of the liturgy and the structures of synagogues; second, there were conflicts over Italian translations of sacred Hebrew texts, the diffusion of such texts and the general question of translating entire prayer books into Italian. Finally, and this will be the focus of this chapter, there were contestations over the content and canon of prayer books: New prayers contingent to the historical period were proposed for inclusion. In turn, prayers that had long been part of the canon were shortened or even removed, especially those differentiating the Jewish population from the non-Jewish majority, like references to Zion or messianism. Elaborating on inclusions, exclusions, and translations will offer the opportunity to develop reflections on the theme of canonization as sacralization.

## 2. Canonization as sacralization: addition and removal of prayers from the liturgy

Concerning the first point, I will only focus on one addition and one removal of prayers that took place in nineteenth-century Italian communities, by ways of example. Having a look at these examples, will raise the question of whether the insertion or removal of a certain prayer from the liturgy constitutes, or not, a case of canonization, both in case of the introduction of

31 On the institutional implementations of Jewish Reform in Italy see *ibid.*, pp. 125–128.

separated pamphlets and of a direct insertion in the *Siddur*. This requires a critical description of the prayer book's process of canonization, or lack thereof. The concept of canonization »describes the process by which a body of symbols, texts, actions, or artifacts is established as authoritative and normative«<sup>32</sup>. Another characteristic of a canon is that it produces meaning of relevance for the community<sup>33</sup>. This definition emphasizes the temporal and spatial dynamics of the crystallization of a canon, as opposed to the »final product«, and is suitable for our purposes. The inclusion of elements into the canon renders them authoritative and normative. This »sacralization of the entire material« is precisely what distinguishes a mere anthology of classics or a legal corpus from a religious canon<sup>34</sup>. The same distinction between classics and canonical texts has been maintained more recently by theologians Mirja Kutzer and Ilse Müllner, who ascribe the former to the cultural and the latter to the religious domain<sup>35</sup>. If asserting that a canon belongs exclusively to a religious domain is controversial, there is consensus that any process of canonization entails some form of sacralization. Kutzer and Müllner define canon as a body of well-defined extent, with a fixed order and design of its texts. These texts are attributed authority, often due to divine revelation. In any case they are of existential significance for the members of the community. The texts incorporated into the canon are attributed normativity, and it is explicitly prohibited to add or remove elements<sup>36</sup>. While this definition, too, stresses normativity and authority, it puts more emphasis on the canon as existing body of texts rather than its dynamic and often contested evolution. The fact that the extent of a Canon is well-defined can apply to Jewish prayer books too, but only inasmuch as this limited extension is like a perimeter, within which small additions or reductions can still be implemented. The order of its parts is substantially fixed, although moments of crisis can necessitate slight changes in their order as well, even in an already crystallized text<sup>37</sup>.

These definitions show how difficult it can be to apply changes to a religious canonical text. Indeed, the reference to canonicity can also be used to deny changes and reforms, which is a strategy that we can frequently observe also in the contestations between Reform and Orthodoxy, as a further confirmation of the *Siddur's* canonical status. While the text design of a prayer book is certainly more flexible than the holy scriptures of a religion, the Jewish prayer book under discussion here has an attributed authority and is of existential significance for the communities using it.

32 BÄHR, Kanon p. 159, my translation.

33 Ibid., p. 161.

34 Ibid.

35 KUTZER/MUELLNER, Heilige Texte.

36 Ibid., pp. 11f.

37 BÄHR, Kanon, p. 160.

Having established that canonization is, indeed, intimately associated with sacralization, we now need to understand in what sense a Jewish prayer book can be regarded as a canonical text. Although some scholars emphasize that the *Siddur* was never technically canonized<sup>38</sup>, there is widespread consensus that it has reached a *de facto* canonical status. Already for the 10th and 11th centuries CE, we can talk about a »canonization of the synagogue service«, which entailed the acceptance of the *Siddur* as one of Judaism's authoritative sources<sup>39</sup>. Reif does not hesitate to call the *Siddur* »authoritative« and even describes its canonization process<sup>40</sup>. It started as a text that could not compare with the authority of the great texts of the Jewish tradition, the Hebrew Bible and the Talmud. It was substantially considered as a suggestion provided by some rabbinical authority, which basically included guidelines on the prayers it contained. The period between the 9th and 12th centuries CE witnessed the appearance of the first forerunners of written, rabbinically approved prayer books, aided by the diffusion of the codex in the Jewish world. In the later part of this period, some major additions to the prayer book still took place, such as the introduction of the so-called *piyyutim*, or liturgical poems. After the 11th/12th centuries, local *minhagim* (customs) started to develop and regional varieties of the prayer book become consolidated. Nevertheless, from that period on there is evidence of an increased reluctance on the part of the rabbinical authorities to approve of major subtractions or additions to the prayer book. Thus, no more major changes were applied until the inception of print, while small variations, mostly in the form of text amendments, actually multiplied<sup>41</sup>. The only accretions consisted of introductory, concluding and parenthetical items<sup>42</sup>. The increase in text amendments also determined a multiplication of text variants of the same prayer. What happened was that, in the late middle-ages, different existing variants of a prayer were often all considered as valid and simply kept and placed in different positions with different functions. However, the change of function of one prayer would cause an alteration of the nature of an entire set of prayers<sup>43</sup>.

In the late Middle Ages, the *Siddur* started to attract a growing number of commentaries, in a quantity and quality that was previously devoted only to the aforementioned canonical texts. In fact, attracting commentaries has been singled out as a further characteristic of a canon<sup>44</sup>. Comments made sure that

38 For instance, Bernard MARTIN, *Prayer in Judaism*, New York/London 1968, p. 8.

39 Lawrence A. HOFFMAN, *The Canonization of the Synagogue Service*, Notre Dame 1979.

40 REIF, *Judaism*, pp. 219–226.

41 *Ibid.*, pp. 132–137.

42 *Ibid.*, p. 202.

43 *Ibid.*, p. 210.

44 KUTZER/MUELLNER, *Heilige Texte*, p. 13.

believers actually engaged with the texts and derived meaning and orientation from them. They show that the canon was alive and actually authoritative. The commentators generally had the purpose of making sure that a text sanctioned by tradition would survive and that its Hebrew text would abide to the forms and grammar of the Hebrew Bible<sup>45</sup>. According to Reif:

[...] what had begun its life as the oral expression of individuals in praise of God and had been given a formal, textual structure [...], was at this later stage [late Middle Ages] becoming transformed into an authoritative representative of classical Jewish writings, for some even a sacred text of sorts<sup>46</sup>.

Thus, if a prayer was added only temporarily to a ritual but did not enter the *Siddur*, we probably cannot talk about sacralization. But if it did, sacralization seems to be an appropriate terminology, due to the authority, canonicity, and ultimately sacrality of the text.

Before delving deeper into the nineteenth-century developments of Italian Jewish liturgy, it is opportune to say something about the historical process of inclusion/exclusion of prayers from the prayer book, because not all the prayers we are going to discuss here will be canonized and definitively included in the *Siddur*.

In early modern times, once the prayer book's text had reached an authoritative and crystallized form, also helped by the invention of print, why would changes still be applied? Stefan Reif, possibly the most important scholar of Jewish liturgy, singled out four main reasons: (1.) Need for peripheral material, which he anyway deemed to be a small factor; (2.) growing influence of the *Kabbalah* and mysticism; (3.) a mutual influence between the change of synagogue structure and the change of prayers; and (4.) reaction to external inputs<sup>47</sup>. Here I will focus on this last aspect.

With the invention of print, we can notice three clear consequences, which are perhaps obvious but important for the current reflection: First, data collection and preservation became less difficult; second, the use of print meant that knowledge was amplified and reinforced, and third, rites became standardized through printed amplification. Between the 15th and 17th century, most changes of words in the prayer book were either the aforementioned text amendments or acts of internal and external censorship, which caused the cancellation of entire parts of prayers<sup>48</sup>.

45 REIF, *Judaism*, p. 221.

46 *Ibid.*, p. 222.

47 *Ibid.*, pp. 213–215.

48 *Ibid.*, pp. 235–240.

In fact, the first two centuries after the invention of print were the last period in which relevant innovations were incorporated in the prayer book. One large contributing factor were the migrations of mostly Sephardi Jews, who, after their expulsion from Spain in 1492 and later from southern Italy in 1541, massively moved around Europe and the Mediterranean Sea, mostly as merchants, and took along Sephardi liturgical influences and absorbed new local ones.

In the following period no major changes occurred until the 19th and 20th centuries, in which we witness innovations of a different type<sup>49</sup>. At that time, innovations were »dictated either by the totally new factor of reformation in response to the dominant ideologies of the non-Jewish environment or for the need of minor and highly circumspect adjustments to take account of changes in the make-up of the communities and the cataclysmic events that precipitated them«<sup>50</sup>. This is consistent with the idea that a canon has the quality of producing religious concepts and, more importantly, that canonization is often a reaction to a crisis<sup>51</sup>.

### 3. The prayers against cholera

Coming to nineteenth-century Italy, I will focus on the addition of one prayer, the one against cholera, which I chose because it can help our reflection on canonization and also represents a case to which we can easily relate today. According to the information I was able to gather, Venice's Jewish community printed a prayer in order »to be preserved from the current danger of Cholera« in 1831, which was then successively reprinted in more editions in 1835 and 1836, in conjunction with new cholera outbreaks. The prayer appeared in Italian, except in one edition, in which it was printed with a parallel Hebrew text. It was composed by the Venetian Rabbi Elijah Aaron Lattes. Similarly, we know that Trieste's Jewish Community printed a prayer against cholera in 1836, written by the chief Rabbi Sabbato Graziadio Treves, recited again in 1849 and also in a reprinted edition in 1855. This one was originally written in Hebrew and only the 1855 edition contained the Italian translation next to the original Hebrew text. These prayers allow for some preliminary considerations<sup>52</sup>. They were all printed in separated sheets or booklets and were not included in the *Siddur*, the canonized prayer book, because they were written

49 Ibid., p. 226.

50 Ibid.

51 BAHR, Kanon, p. 160.

52 All these prayers are described in Alessandro PORRO/Debora Sabrina IANNOTTI, A peste, fame et bello libera nos. Preghiere ed epidemie, Rudiano 2020, pp. 52–54, pp. 65–67, pp. 108–120.

for a contingent situation. They were always accompanied by the recitation of specific Psalms, already canonized texts which covered a more general need of praying for infirmity, natural calamities, and for preserving one's health. As it was in the author's intentions, they were certainly received acknowledging the authority of the Rabbis who composed them, since their texts were kept intact in the following editions, too. The recitation of Lattes' prayer always had to be accompanied by the recitation of some Psalms (19, 90, 121), as to reinforce the sacrality of the new prayer. Printing them on separated booklets and not directly added to the text of the prayer book allowed their author to be relatively precise concerning the prayer's aim. At the same time, the fact that a certain degree of vagueness was nevertheless maintained suggests the author envisaged the possibility of reprinting and reusing the prayer in future similar occasions. A request to forgive one's sins preceded the prayer itself, as it was often the case, creating a connection between sin and misfortune or disease in this case. Then, the actual object of the prayer followed:

[...] by your ineffable holy name, move to pity your creatures and save them from all sickness and adversity, affliction and distress, from pestilence and mortality, from every disease and malignant affliction, so that we may attend to the execution of your wills, to serve you with reverence and love, and to work what pleases you [...] <sup>53</sup>.

Thus, pestilence and disease were the clear causes that prompted the prayer, being general enough to be suitable for cholera and other diseases, but sufficiently precise not to fit other types of misfortunes or accidents. As is evident in the text, the specific request was then followed by a promise to always do God's will, establishing a sequence of sin, followed by punishment, disease, recovery, and, ultimately, redemption.

The problem of needing to compose a prayer for an epidemic without modifying a canonical text like the *Siddur* found similar solutions outside of Italy, too. For instance, Würzburg's chief Rabbi Abraham Bing (1752–1841) wrote a prayer against cholera in 1831 as well. The same prayer was then reprinted and reused in 1847<sup>54</sup>. Some scholars have argued that the frequent reprint of such external pamphlets with prayers maintaining a crystallized text would

53 In the Italian original: »Per l'ineffabile sacrosanto tuo nome, muoviti a pietà delle tue creature e salvaci da ogni male ed avversità, affanno ed angoscia, da pestilenza e mortalità, da qualsiasi morbo e maligna affezione, in guisa che possiamo attendere all'esecuzione dei tuoi voleri, a servirti con riverenza ed amore, e ad operar ciò che ti piace«. All the English translations of the Italian originals are my own.

54 Abraham BING, Prayer composed during the cholera pandemic outbreak 1831 and 1847, in: Korot. Israel Journal of the History of Medicine and Science 7/9f. (1979), pp. 719f.

provide evidence of a factual treatment of these prayers in some sort of »canonized form«<sup>55</sup>. However, I would argue against considering these situational pamphlets as canonical texts. They were certainly authoritative and accepted as such, but not canonical. I would argue that their reprints with unmodified texts stemmed rather from the awareness that they would have certainly had to face other epidemics in the future and responded to the practical needs of the printing houses of reusing an existing, already authoritative and accepted text.

Instead, if we consider a more specific insertion of a new prayer in a *Siddur*, that is, in a canonical text, we see that Psalm 121, which is a general request to God for help, is also used in the *Imre Lev. Preghiere di un cuore Israelita (Prayers of an Israelite heart)*<sup>56</sup>, a reformed prayer book, which will be introduced in more detail later. In this prayer book, too, Psalm 121 is utilized as a way to reinforce the sacrality of a specific prayer or of the whole book, according to the position it takes within a specific edition. For instance, in the first edition of the book (1852), this Psalm accompanies the prayer for the »Achievement of civil emancipation«, which was newly inserted in this version of the *Siddur*<sup>57</sup>. In fact, it is important to consider that *Imre Lev*'s first edition was printed in Piedmont. There, the resident Jews had achieved full civil emancipation already in 1848, way earlier than all the other Jews of the Italian peninsula, who achieved it in 1861 with Italy's unification or later, when parts of the peninsula were annexed to the Kingdom of Italy (1866 the Habsburg regions and 1870 Rome). In this prayer book's second edition, however, printed in Trieste in 1864, Psalm 121 was moved forward, to the very beginning of the text, as if the wish had been to sacralize the whole prayer book, but perhaps also in order to remove emphasis from the prayer for the emancipation, considering that Trieste's Jews had not yet achieved full civil emancipation at the time of its publication<sup>58</sup>. The *Imre Lev*, in fact, does not include specific prayers for epidemics but does indeed contain two prayers that can be recited when afflicted by diseases: one more individually-oriented, called »Prayer in case of injury or some kind of distress« (»Preghiera in un infortunio o in un qualche affanno«); and one with a public dimension, named »In times of public calamity« (»In tempo di pubblica calamità«). The latter is more suitable for a general epidemic hitting not only the Jewish community but the entire hosting society:

55 PORRO/IANNOTTI, *A Peste*, p. 54.

56 Marco TEDESCHI, *Imre Lev. Preghiere di un cuore Israelita*, Asti 1852.

57 *Ibid.*, p. 64.

58 *Ibid.*, p. 4.

Oh Lord, do you remain far away?

Why do you hide from our gaze, when we are in distress?

Filled with faith of hope, O Lord, to you my heart rises in the days of sorrow and calamity; I invoke your mercy for my brethren and for me; reject me not, O my God, forsake me not in the hour of woe. Behold, thy cast-off children are in desolation, because thy hand is laid upon us because of our sins; have mercy on our repentance. We confess that unworthy are we of thy grace, but we hope in thy love.

O our Father, forgive our sins, and the offenses we do to your name, as you forgave our fathers when they implored you; come to our rescue, O Lord, and deliver us. Though I acknowledge myself unworthy of your goodness, yet my heart is reassured, for I know that you watch over me as well, and do not reject the prayer of your son.

Blessed are You, O Lord, who answers prayer and supplications<sup>59</sup>.

Without making a detailed text analysis, which is beyond the scope of this chapter, it is immediately noticeable, how the prayer takes a communal dimension («my brethren«, «thy cast-off children«), while the second part zooms in to the individual. The «Prayer in case of injury or some kind of distress«, instead, reaches a more personal level and does not imply a communal dimension. In this prayer, we see that «[...] the weight of the injury aggravates on my body; my heart succumbs under the bundle of pain, but hope does not abandon me«<sup>60</sup>, and at the same time «Our Father« («Padre nostro«) becomes «My Father« («Padre mio«). The individual dimension is here selfevident while the prayer involves the reality of physical pain in a clearer way than the one against public calamity. The theme of forgiveness from the sins and, therefore, of connection between sin and misfortune is equally present, even if made explicit after the request. However, unlike the specific prayer against cholera, this prayer has a much vaguer reference to «sorrow« and «calamity«, which can certainly be used for an epidemic but could be equally efficient for

59 Ibid., p. 228: «Pieno di fede di speranza, o Signore, a te si eleva il mio cuore nei giorni del dolore e della calamità; invoco la tua misericordia pe' miei fratelli e per me; non respingermi, o mio Dio, non abbandonarmi nell'ora della sventura. Osserva, i tuoi figli gettati sono nella desolazione, perché la tua mano si è aggravata su noi a cagione dei nostri peccati; abbi pietà del nostro pentimento. Noi confessiamo che indegni siamo della tua grazia, ma speriamo nell'amor tuo«.

O Padre nostro, perdona alle nostre colpe, ed alle offese che facciamo al tuo nome, come perdonavi ai nostri padri quando ti imploravano; vieni in nostro soccorso, o Signore, e liberaci. Sebbene mi riconosca indegno della bontà tua, tuttavia il mio cuore è rassicurato, perché conosco che tu vegli pure su me, e non respingi la preghiera del figlio tuo. Benedetto tu, o Signore, che esaudisci la preghiera e le supplicazioni«.

60 Ibid., pp. 218–220. In the Italian original «Il peso dell'infortunio si aggrava sul mio corpo; il mio cuore soccombe sotto il fascio del dolore, ma la speranza non mi abbandona«.



other sorts of public misfortune. But it is exactly its vagueness and general nature that allow this prayer to be inserted in a canonical text and assume a sacred dimension. In order to be completely canonized and crystallized within a prayer book that supposedly should be used for a very long time, if not for eternity, the prayer needed to be quite general and versatile.

Both the prayer inserted in the *Siddur* and the one printed on a separated pamphlet responded to a circumstantial need of requesting health, for the individual and for the community. However, the prayer printed on an external pamphlet was more specific and contingent, even if repeatable in the future, and did not envisage any kind of sacralization, in spite of its accepted authoritative status. The prayer inserted in the *Siddur* assumed a sacred dimension as part of a sacred, canonical text.

It is important to emphasize that, in the case of canonical texts, the process of removal of parts of the text is just specular to that of selection of what to keep and the inclusion of new parts, being the result of choices that equally belong to the canonization process. Here, I would like to provide an example of a prayer that is expunged from the canon, to show the ambivalence of a canonization process<sup>61</sup>. Generally speaking, the modernization Judaism was undergoing in the nineteenth-century put pressure on the communities' leaders to adapt the liturgy to the new needs of the population, especially after the achievement of full civil emancipation for most Italian Jews after 1861. This determined a general tendency towards a shortening of the prayers and the complete removal of others, for instance the elimination of each prayer referring to Zion and to messianic times. These modifications presupposed the elaboration of new hierarchies about what deserved to maintain the sacrality of prayer and what not. An interesting example of this is the abolition of the *Birkat HaKohanim*, the priestly blessing in the reformed community of Asti in 1889. This is connected to the loss of importance and sanctity for the role of the Kohen, the priest (to be distinguished from the Rabbi), within Reform Judaism. This figure, which of course traces back its origins to the time of Temple Judaism, only maintains a role in Orthodox Judaism, with a few liturgical duties, such as performing the priestly blessing. Removing this role from the liturgy strips it of its sacrality and has the removal of its specific prayer as a consequence, concretely expunging it from the canon. Thus, removals and deletions from a text are part of the crystallization process of a canonical corpus too. The loss of elements of a certain tradition is equally the result of a choice of conservation of a different one.

61 Bahr, *Kanon*, p. 160.

#### 4. Italian translations of the prayer book

The second aspect I seek to analyze in this chapter is the use of Italian in liturgical texts. It is possible to argue that in the 19th century the Italian language underwent a form of sacralization, as it was brought on par to Hebrew, which of course maintained its status of *Lashon Ha-Kodesh*, or Holy Language, and never lost its sacred dimension.

It is important to underline how languages other than Hebrew had been widely used in Jewish liturgy already in much earlier eras, differing according to the exact period and geographical locations. In the first centuries CE, for instance, Greek and Aramaic had already been utilized as liturgical languages in their own right and not as mere translations of Hebrew prayers<sup>62</sup>. Shortly after that also some individual prayers in Judeo-Arabic started being used. As early as the Middle Ages, the need to let the least educated layers of the population understand certain passages of the liturgy gave rise to the inclusion of prayers in vernacular languages written in Hebrew characters, such as Judeo-Arabic, Judeo-Spanish, Judeo-Italian, Yiddish or Judeo-Provençal<sup>63</sup>. Entire editions in one of these languages were published already in the 16th and 17th centuries, in some cases with the explicit intention of meeting the needs of women and children. In the 16th and 17th centuries appeared the first complete translations in secular, non-Jewish languages, such as Spanish, Italian, French, English and German. This did not affect the historical sacrality of the Hebrew language. The real novelty, however, appears in nineteenth-century Western Europe. It consists of dual texts, in which Hebrew and the local vernacular appear side by side, in which the European language »came to be used not only for the occasional public prayer, for the purposes of Jewish advocacy in the general world, but also as an alternative means of liturgical expression, of equal validity with Hebrew«<sup>64</sup>. The specific Italian case was no exception. If synagogue sermons in Italian had been long before the 19th century widely accepted, dual texts with Hebrew and Italian became relatively widespread in the 19th century<sup>65</sup>.

The first *Siddur* I found with an Italian translation facing the Hebrew text, page by page, dates back to 1802. Interestingly enough, it is an edition printed in Basel, Switzerland, for the Sephardi communities in Italy. This *Siddur* alone can tell us so much about Italian Jewry at the beginning of the 19th century. Being from 1802, it predates all the modifications implemented by the Reform movement, including their earliest German manifestations. This shows that

62 REIF, *Judaism*, p. 279.

63 *Ibid.*

64 *Ibid.*, p. 280.

65 *Ibid.*

innovations, such as the translation of the prayers, were not only spurred by Reform instances but were also indicators of ongoing changes also within Orthodoxy. Nevertheless, the use of translations of canonical texts was still perceived as controversial even in a transitional period like the 19th century. Italian translations next to or instead of the Hebrew and Aramaic texts were not unanimously accepted. Even within Orthodoxy, Italian communities adopted different solutions, influenced by the particular inclination of the local rabbinical authorities but also by the needs of the publishers. On the one hand, there was the wish of establishing the »original text«, in the original language of the prayer book, as it typically occurs, when trying to fix a canon<sup>66</sup>. Thus, the communities of the Italkim turned to Samuel David Luzzatto (1800–1865), the most prominent Italian Jewish intellectual of the 19th century in order to draft a »definitive« prayer book for the festive days of the whole year (*Machzor*). His authority in theological and philological terms was widely acknowledged, and the book was published by the famous Livorno printer Belforte in 1856. The prayer book was entirely in Hebrew and Aramaic, including the instructions between prayers, and responded to the wish of creating a national liturgy for Italian Jews at a time when Italy's unification was perceived as imminent. In other cases, the communities and the publishers commissioned Italian translations to be placed next to the original Hebrew and Aramaic texts. For instance, the same Luzzatto made an Italian translation of the *Ashkenazi Siddur*, published in two editions in 1821 and 1829, and the Italian translation of the *Siddur* of the Italkim published in 1829, both by the renowned Viennese publisher Anton Schmidt.

Even more interestingly for this contribution's topic, long before the official institution of reformed Temples, reformed prayer books were published completely in the Italian language. Not simply with an Italian translation parallel to the original Hebrew text but exclusively Italian texts. Among them, the most noteworthy is Rabbi Marco Tedeschi's aforementioned *Imre Lev. Preghiere di un cuore Israelita*, published by Paglieri in Asti in 1852<sup>67</sup>, which is actually the translation of a prayer book in French, published by the Rabbi of Strasbourg in 1848<sup>68</sup>. The *Imre Lev* was entirely in Italian, except for the title itself and for the headers of the different prayers which were left in Hebrew, at time transliterated. The book even contains the indication of the prayers that had been removed. The impact of the *Imre Lev* and, therefore, of a reformed liturgy, on Italian predominantly Orthodox Jewry should be studied in depth, if we consider that it was a rather widely used prayer book among Italian

66 KUTZER/MUELLNER, Heilige Texte, p. 13.

67 TEDESCHI, *Imre Lev*.

68 ARON ARNAUD, *Prière d'un coeur israelite. Recueil de prières et de méditations pour toutes les circonstances de la vie*, Strasbourg 1848.

Jews, according to several important scholars<sup>69</sup>. This prayer book alone was reprinted in more than ten editions just in the 19th century. Another reformed prayer book that had been drafted entirely in Italian, though perhaps less popular, was Marco Mortara's 1866 publication of the *Formulario delle orazioni degli israeliti (Prayer book of prayers for the Israelites)*<sup>70</sup>. Its imperative use, at least in merely liturgical elements, came under discussion and, as a matter of fact, its usage was challenged. Still, being able to recite the prayers correctly and understand them became more important than the role of Hebrew as a holy language in the liturgy.

## 5. Conclusion

We have seen how, after centuries of relatively little alterations to the prayers assembled in the *Siddur*, the 19th century witnessed a new type of major modifications of the canonical text of the prayer book. The needs of adaptation to modernity, the wish to better fit within majority society, and the contestations over Jewish reform were accompanied by changes to the canonized content of the prayer book.

We have established in how far canonization and sacralization are related, respectively implicated in each other, as we have considered a religious canon. Nevertheless, we have observed how not every introduction of new prayers in the liturgy constitutes a form of sacralization, as not all the new prayers were accepted into the canon. When these prayers are directly added to the *Siddur*, they become parts of a textual dimension that is already invested of sacrality through its canonization. I have argued that other occasional prayers printed in external pamphlets do not constitute a form of sacralization, first because they do not join the sacred dimension of the canonical text and second because of the too specific and contingent object of the prayer. Even though the text's authority was recognized and was published with the expectation it would be reused and reprinted, it did not reach, in my view, the level of universalism and intangibility that a sacred element should have. In this respect, I have tried to show that the prayer against diseases included in the new reformed prayer book *Imre Lev* has a much more general character, sufficient to make it achieve a universal, intangible, and non-negotiable, hence sacred, status. Thus, we have seen that if we take individual modifications of the liturgy or

<sup>69</sup> For instance, Gadi LUZZATTO VOGHERA, *La religione degli ebrei in Italia*, in: *La Rassegna Mensile d'Israel* 76/1–2 (2010), pp. 257–274, at p. 266 and Paolo DE BENEDETTI, *In margine a un libro di preghiere e al suo traduttore*, in: Felice ISRAEL et al. (eds.), *Hebraica Miscellanea di studi in onore di Sergio J. Sierra per il suo 75° compleanno*, Turin 1998, pp. 211–218, at p. 211.

<sup>70</sup> Marco MORTARA, *Formulario delle orazioni degli israeliti*, Mantua 1866.

of the structure around it, we do not necessarily encounter forms of sacralization. As the example of the prayers against cholera has shown, sometimes contingent situations determine a practical need for new prayers, for instance. In fact, concerning sacralization mechanisms, the prayers for diseases deviate from the general trends, as mirrored in nineteenth-century Italian Jewish liturgy, because they do not respond to the Italian Jews' wish to react to modernization instances and to fit within majority society, nor are they the result of contestations of the reformers. On the contrary, the diffusion of Italian translations next to the Hebrew text or the drafting of reformed prayer books exclusively in Italian and also specific additions and removals of prayers from the *Siddur*, responded to the aforementioned need of nineteenth-century Italian Jews.

Having clarified mechanisms of canonization in nineteenth-century Jewish liturgy and what can be excluded from these mechanisms, I would like to conclude discussing the link between canonization and integration processes in majority society postulated by this chapter. In order to try and explain this link, I would like to use the concept of »Chukkot Ha-Goyim« or »imitation of the Gentile«, as mentioned in the introduction. It originally refers to a prohibition that has its roots in the books of Leviticus and Deuteronomy, where in synthesis there is a warning against »walking in the ways of the people or following the customs of the people«. This prohibition has sparked abundant discussion in rabbinical literature in general, and in particular in interpretative texts of the *Halachah*. Already back in 1925, the Dutch Jewish intellectual Juda Lion Palache, Professor of Semitic Languages at the University of Amsterdam, elaborated on this subject, and stated that in narrow terms this prohibition only refers to the liturgical customs of Jewish life but in a broader interpretation it has taken up also what he calls »ethnological« and »psychological« meanings, substantially extending it to all sectors of Jewish life<sup>71</sup>. Palache's interpretation is anyways simply an observation of the actual historical development of the meanings of this concept. In fact, as it is well known, an explicit prohibition oftentimes underlies a substantial diffusion of a certain custom. Indeed, when considering the broader interpretation of this concept, this has not univocally been perceived negatively, in spite of being a prohibition, but it has been accepted as an existing fact. If we wish to find a common thread among the aforementioned examples, this lies precisely in the desire to fit in within majority society. For this reason, I would argue that on the one hand we have all the individual cases of »sacralization« through canonization, that is, through official inclusion within a canonical text or

71 Juda L. PALACHE, *Huqqot Ha-Goyim*, in: *Bijdragen en Mededeelingen van het Genootschap voor de Joodsche Wetenschap in Nederland* 3 (1925), pp. 58–70, at p. 58.

sacred liturgical performances and spaces<sup>72</sup>, whose motivations and sacralization mechanisms require individual analysis. On the other hand, we have a parallel sacralization dynamic, which is a large dome encapsulating a great part of the liturgical innovations of the nineteenth century: the Italian Jews' wish to fit within majority society, its customs and modes. This has inspired numerous transformations of the liturgy. In other words, as Gadi Luzzatto Voghera noticed, in different respects Italian Jews often tended to adhere to Christian models about them, including an adaptation of the liturgy and its performances to those of the Catholic majority<sup>73</sup>. Thus, canonization is a fascinating and unusual vintage point for the observation of Jewish integration processes in majority society, which would require further investigations. It illustrates an apparently paradoxical element, that is, the fact that a canon can work in two different directions. Inwards, it classically becomes a stabilization factor within Jewish society, a way to regulate internal dynamics and power conflicts. Outwards, it can even help a certain Jewry in times of socio-political transition, both as an indicator and as a facilitator of integration in majority society.

72 Johannes HEIL/Frederek MUSALL (eds.), *Sakrale Räume im Judentum*, Heidelberg 2020.

73 LUZZATTO VOGHERA, *Religione degli ebrei*, p. 259.

## II. MEDIALITIES OF THE SACRED





Inga Mai Groote

## The Sound of the Sacred

### Transfers of Sacrality in Contemporary Choral Music

In European music history, music associated with cult and religious practices occupies an important position, since church and religious institutions have been important bearers of musical culture for a long time. On the one hand, the need for different kinds of music for the liturgy motivated compositions; on the other hand, they financed institutional structures such as chapels in which professional musicians worked. In modern times, not only has the role of sacred music itself changed considerably, but the venues for its performance and reception have become much more diverse and, to a large extent, no longer religious – such as at concerts, festivals, or recordings that are individually useable. In addition, references to sacred music can now be found in a wide variety of ways and in a large number of non-religious works. In the following, examples of recent choral music will be used to discuss the transfer of sacrality<sup>1</sup> into a secular context, in the form of concerts and, in particular, on culturally and socially representative occasions. In this process, types of music that were originally clearly sacred or liturgical in nature can be reframed and related to secular themes and occasions. However, the musical genres, idioms, or *topoi* used continue to convey connotations of the sacred. The use of languages can also serve as an effective means in this respect, especially with Latin, as a language that is strongly connoted with a sacred aura for listeners of the 21st century. The first examples presented below demonstrate the cultural accessibility of the significance of religious backgrounds to audiences in a contemporary non-religious context, and the following ones illustrate the use of similar work concepts and compositional strategies in works for official occasions, with which – it can be assumed – an intentional transfer of the sacred into a sphere of cultural life occurs.

1 Cf. for the term »transfer of sacrality«: Mona OZOUF, *Festivals and the French Revolution*, transl. by Alan SHERIDAN, Cambridge et al. 1988, pp. 262–282. – I am very grateful to Fiona Kizzie Lee for her corrections to my English; any errors that remain are my own.

The fact that the originally sacred music from various periods is now performed in concerts is, of course, a widespread phenomenon that cannot be dealt with in detail here. In many of these cases, the music is listened to on the basis of its musical qualities, that is, as a successful artistic realisation, and not as an expression of a religious belief on the part of the audience<sup>2</sup>. However, music can be understood in this context as a way of articulating fundamental narratives of human or spiritual life even without a concrete reference to God, as the strong Christian imprint on European culture continues to be effective<sup>3</sup>. It can be observed that the cultural heritage of sacred music continues to be cultivated, even outside its original context, and can be employed under changed circumstances and with different objectives.

## 1. Background

However, these phenomena are certainly not without preconditions and are partly based on long-standing traditions. Music that is clearly associated with the sacred in the sense that it is used for rituals and worship exists in many religions. In the history of Western European music, this would include primarily the music used in Catholic and later Protestant Christianity. Church music, in the narrower sense, belongs to the liturgy (like Gregorian chant, polyphonic masses and requiems, or various kinds of psalm settings), or can supplement the liturgy as is the case with genres (like motets or organ preludes) that can be considered paraliturgical. In this field, there have always been debates whether music of a certain type is appropriate for this purpose. Since at least the Renaissance, it has been discussed whether styles that can be recognised as »secular« (certain songs or operatic music) should have a place in the context of church music, or whether church music should rather convey a certain dignity, which could be achieved, for example, by adhering to traditional compositional methods, such as counterpoint, or by using only voices and no instruments.

- 2 Jonathan ARNOLD, *Sacred Music in Secular Society*, Farnham 2014; however, the author argues from a theologically affirmative perspective that seeks to endorse (sacred) music today as a means of contact with God; he draws extensively on the opinions of performers. More specifically regarding Gregorian chant and early polyphony during the 1990s, see Olav ROSSBACH, *Alte Musik und Neosakralisierung*, in: Wolfgang GRATZER / Harmut MOELLER (eds.), *Übersetzte Zeit. Das Mittelalter und die Musik der Gegenwart*, Hildesheim 2001, pp. 191–235.
- 3 Daniel CHUA, *Music as the Mouthpiece of Theology*, in: Jeremy BEGBIE / Steven GUTHRIE (eds.), *Resonant Witness. Conversations Between Music and Theology*, Grand Rapids 2011, pp. 137–161, at p. 138.

Within church music, however, musical means for expressing the supernatural can also be deliberately sought after – either by means of symbolic links, or when it is a matter of realising liminality in sound (which produces often musically fascinating results): for example, when music is meant to evoke the heavenly music or the divine. In the 17th century, one such means could be to place the performance forces in spatially separated groups, so that the sound comes at the listeners from all sides. In the opposite direction of transfer, from the religious into other contexts, music can become a carrier of connotations of the sacred: This is especially true with certain genres or styles, for example, with a solemn contrapuntal movement or a four-part homophonic chorale. Such sonic topoi can then also be transferred into other contexts, as in the nineteenth-century symphonies with »choral« themes (for example the fourth movement of Robert Schumann's »Rhenish« Symphony)<sup>4</sup>.

From the 18th century onwards, however, a fundamentally different mode of perception is established. It has been debated in recent research as a phenomenon of immersion, and in some cases a re-sacralization may occur<sup>5</sup>: The famous *Miserere* of Gregorio Allegri, which was sung in the Sistine Chapel during the Holy Week, was actually a clearly defined liturgical composition. Travellers, however, described it as a fascinating listening experience, but also as a particularly spiritual experience: A famous account of the traveller Georg Arnold Jacobi in 1796 says:

This leaves all sacred music I've ever heard [...]. A deep silence falls and four voices, the purest I ever heard, start to sing. O, nameless harmony, how it all flows and tunes into itself. I almost lost ground and I envied the cardinals for their quiet place [...]. Never had anything touched and moved me like this chant<sup>6</sup>.

A weakening of boundaries between the sacred and secular spheres might already be at work here: The experience clearly belonged to a clearly liturgical context, but could be perceived by travellers as a broader spiritual experience,

4 For a compact discussion of important examples, see Thomas SCHMIDT, Ein' feste Burg ist unser Gott? Der Choral in der Instrumentalmusik des 19. Jahrhunderts zwischen sakralem Andachtstospos und konfessionellem Statement, in: Klaus FITSCHEN et al. (eds.), Kulturelle Wirkungen der Reformation. Kongressdokumentation Lutherstadt Wittenberg August 2017, vol. 1, Leipzig 2018, pp. 307–316.

5 On this context, see Anne HOLZMUELLER, Konfessioneller Transfer und musikalische Immersion im späten 18. Jahrhundert, in: Kirchenmusikalisches Jahrbuch 101 (2017), pp. 75–99.

6 Georg Arnold JACOBI, Zehnter Brief, Rom den 15ten April 1792, in: Id. (ed.), Briefe aus der Schweiz und Italien, vol. 1, Leipzig et al. 1796, pp. 344–358, at p. 352f., URL: <<https://www.digitale-sammlungen.de/de/view/bsb10469463?page=364&q=Harmonie>> (06-26-2023), my translation; see also HOLZMUELLER, Konfessioneller Transfer, p. 89.

regardless of the work's original context and of the listeners' personal confessional adherence. Since the Romantic period, with authors like E. T. A. Hoffmann, Wilhelm Heinrich Wackenroder, and Ludwig Tieck, music has increasingly been postulated to have the potential to carry listeners off to a »realm of spirits« (Hoffmann) of its own: now the music itself is sacralized. The focus shifts to instrumental music as »absolute« music, reaching a climax around 1900; this has also been extensively discussed in research<sup>7</sup>. For music, however, this development in the 19th century also goes hand in hand with the development of certain social practices which established a concert culture, which we are still familiar with: Concert halls and concert attendance are the sites and rituals where concentrated listening communities devoted themselves to the reception of music. In the case of literature, it has been emphasized, following Bernd Auerochs, that for not notion of art-religion, firstly, the reciprocity of the relationship between literature and religion and, secondly, the aestheticisation of the religious are important factors to consider<sup>8</sup>; this can be observed analogously in music.

In twentieth-century music, we find a relatively large number of works that are clearly secular, but at the same time retain references to sacred traditions, for example »secular« oratorios like Michael Tippett's *A Child of Our Time* (1944)<sup>9</sup>. The work depicts Herschel Grynszpan's assassination of the German embassy secretary in Paris in 1938. Formally, it follows the type of oratorios established by Bach and Handel (which, with Handel, had already made a transition from church music to concert music). Tippett also uses a specific, religiously charged style, well-known spirituals, for central statements. The use of the spirituals in a piece about a Jewish protagonist draws on the parallel that spirituals were originally the music of an oppressed people, so that a transfer of meaning is possible. Negative references to the sacred are also possible, especially when the works touch on political themes. This very brief sketch of the major lines is useful to keep in mind, because this background and these traditions also continue to have an effect in more recent times.

7 See, for example Michael FISCHER, Musik, in: Peter DINZELBACHER (ed.), *Handbuch der Religionsgeschichte im deutschsprachigen Raum*, vol. 5, Paderborn et al. 2007, pp. 215–223; Jan BRACHMANN, Kunst – Religion – Krise. Der Fall Brahms, Kassel et al. 2003; Siegfried OECHSLE / Bernd SPONHEUER (eds.), *Kunstreligion und Musik 1800 – 1900 – 2000*, Kassel et al. 2015.

8 Bernd AUEROCHS, Was ist eigentlich Kunstreligion? Reflexionen zu einem Phantasma um 1800, in: Michael HOFMANN / Carsten ZELLE (eds.), *Aufklärung und Religion. Neue Perspektiven*, Hannover 2010, pp. 205–222; Heinrich DETERING, Was ist Kunstreligion? Systematische und historische Bemerkungen, in: Albert MEIER et al. (eds.), *Kunstreligion. Ein ästhetisches Konzept der Moderne in seiner Entfaltung*, vol. 1: *Der Ursprung des Konzepts um 1800*, Berlin / Boston 2011, pp. 11–28.

9 For a presentation of this work, see Kenneth GLOAG, *Tippett: A Child of Our Times*, Cambridge 1999.

## 2. Choral music as a bearer of sacred cultural traditions

The examples discussed below date from the last 25 years circa and are mainly compositions by Scandinavian and Baltic composers, whose choral music has enjoyed great international success in recent times. The composers in question have their works regularly performed at major international festivals, receive important commissions and collaborate with renowned ensembles and choirs. It is especially interesting to observe the ambivalent relationship to sacred references in their compositions. Here, traditions of sacred music are creatively employed or evoked, but these traditions can be detached from their original background or they can be recombined and thus create new contexts of meaning. The (allegedly »typically Nordic«) sound of such works is easily discernible. It is often a combination of reduction, (neo)minimalist repetition and archaisms, such as the employment of empty chords or parallel voice-leading<sup>10</sup>. These compositional features are, for example, easily recognizable in the music of the Estonian composer Arvo Pärt<sup>11</sup>. However, these characteristics are related to his personal religiousness and also, until his emigration in 1980, to his conflicts with the Soviet cultural policy. In general, in the countries of the Eastern Bloc, the use of sacred references could be an expression of dissidence, as is prominently the case in the oeuvre of Sofia Gubaidulina<sup>12</sup>; and since 1989, a reemergence of spiritual themes can be observed in works by composers active in the Baltic countries, renegotiating their cultural traditions and identities<sup>13</sup>.

The examples chosen for the following discussion are works that are not intended for religious contexts, and in which the composers do not claim a specific (Christian) religiosity in their selfstatements or comments on these works. Nevertheless, we can identify elements influenced or connoted by sacred matters on the textual or musical level. These works will be examined

10 Cf. the short overview presenting major figures by Chester L. ALWES, *A History of Western Choral Music*, Oxford 2016, vol. 2, pp. 273–288 (European Centrism) and pp. 372–378 (The New Simplificities).

11 Peter C. BOUTENEFF et al. (eds.), *Arvo Pärt. Sounding the Sacred*, New York 2020; Laura DOLB, *Miserere. Arvo Pärt and the Medieval Present*, in: Stephen C. MEYER / Kirsten YRI (eds.), *The Oxford Handbook of Music and Medievalism*, Oxford 2020, pp. 367–396.

12 E. g., Dorothea REDEPENNING, *Klingende Symbole des Glaubens. Zur Musik von Sofia Gubaidulina*, in: *Kirchenmusikalisches Jahrbuch 84* (2000), pp. 33–49; for a broader overview, Oksana NESTERENKO, *A Forbidden Fruit? Religion, Spirituality and Music in the USSR Before Its Fall (1964–1991)*, Diss. State Univ. of New York, Stony Brook 2021.

13 For some examples, Lutz LESLE, *Ruhe den Toten, Friede den Lebenden. Neue geistliche Chormusik aus den baltischen Ländern*, in: *Musik & Kirche 72/5* (2002), pp. 310–316; id., *Durchbruch nach langer Stille. Neue geistliche Chormusik aus den baltischen Ländern*, in: *Musik & Kirche 76/3* (2006), pp. 178–183.

in order to establish what function they have as mediators of sacred references in their respective contexts.

*Unicornis captivatur*<sup>14</sup> is a piece by Ola Gjeilo (\*1978), a Norwegian-born composer who lives in New York and is also active as a choral conductor and pianist. *Unicornis* is based on a hymn from the Codex Engelberg, a late fourteenth-century Benedictine manuscript. The manuscript is known in musicology for containing important examples of early sacred songs. The text is a poetic reworking of extracts from the *Physiologus*, employing elaborate animal symbolism combined with a creed-like outline of the story of Christ's resurrection<sup>15</sup>. In the beginning, a clearly structured melody in unison, and then in two-part harmony, is heard, which could be interpreted as an imitation of the structure of medieval songs. The rest of the strophes are set in a rather lyric and romantic tone, with emphasis on important phrases, especially the lament in the third strophe (»necat illum«) and the slow build-up of sound with the »sleep« before resurrection (»Tris diebus«). The rhythmically very lively refrain »Alleluia canite / agni morienti [...]« brings all voices together in a triumphant mood<sup>16</sup>.

In his commentary on the work, the composer claims to have been inspired only by the poetic qualities of the text:

[The piece is] not written for any kind of occasion or commission, but [is] simply born out of the inspiration of a particular text that lights a spark in a composer's heart [...] I was greatly inspired by the colourful and powerful symbolism and just the sheer drama, joy and sense of triumph that the text exudes<sup>17</sup>.

This declaration presents the piece as a functionless, non-religious work. However, Gjeilo's interpretation, which refers only to abstract emotions, would probably not be possible if it were not based on an underlying knowledge of the Christian content, as the text will probably remain quite obscure at first glance for today's audiences. Special background knowledge is needed in

14 Ola GJEILO, *Unicornis captivatur*, for mixed chorus a cappella, Oslo 2001.

15 For a discussion of the theological significance of the text, see Rainer HIRSCH-LUIPOLD, *Unicornis captivatur*. Das Deutungsverfahren des *Physiologus* und die Rezeption und theologische Deutung seiner Tiersymbolik in mittelalterlicher Dichtung und zeitgenössischer Musik, in: Zbyněk KINDSCHI GARSKÝ/Rainer HIRSCH-LUIPOLD (eds.), *Christus in natura: Quellen, Hermeneutik und Rezeption des Physiologus*, Berlin / Boston 2020, pp. 133–148; for music, only a few elements illustrating the text are mentioned.

16 For the complete Latin text with English translation and a recording (World Youth Choir), see the composer's webpage, *Unicornis Captivatur*, published by Ola GJEILO, URL: <<https://olagjeilo.com/sheet-music/choral-satb-a-cappella/unicornis-captivatur/>> (06-26-2023).

17 GJEILO, *Unicornis*, preface (n. pag).

particular to understand the animal symbolism. In order to understand the message of the text, this symbolism must also be related to the Christian account of the resurrection. Gjeilo's setting, however, clearly underlines this Christian meaning of the text (the jubilation in the »Alleluia« refrain is very clear, as well as the joyful singing »for the dying lamb«). Since the meaning of the text is probably only revealed when its originally sacred dimension is acknowledged, the question arises as to what extent the piece's presentation as »independent« actually holds. The Christian framework of meaning would have to be present for the audience, at least in the form of cultural knowledge. Gjeilo uses texts of Christian origin in similar ways in other compositions, for example the Song of Song text »Pulchra es, amica mea« in a shorter setting with the suggestive title *Northern Lights*, which refers to the natural phenomenon of *Aurora borealis*, depicting (natural) beauty<sup>18</sup>.

With *Path of Miracles*<sup>19</sup>, Joby Talbot (\*1971) presented a piece that has since been very successful and in which the four movements evoke important stations of the Camino de Santiago (Roncesvalles, Burgos, Leon, Santiago). The theme of the composition is thus a Christian pilgrimage, which in the present day, is often carried out secularly, as an experience of self-discovery. The composer describes himself as an atheist, but had intended the composition (commissioned by the vocal ensemble *Tenebrae*) to be performed at the literal stations of the Camino de Santiago; it was ultimately premiered in concert at the City of London Festival<sup>20</sup>. The depiction of the stations of the Camino is based on a collage of sacred and secular texts in languages associated with the Way<sup>21</sup>, combining sacred and secular topics and doing so through references to sacred music (Gregorian chant, recitation, early forms of European polyphony, but also Asian religious music) and secular music (folklore, dance forms). The work can be fittingly described as a »secular piece that portrays sacred worship«<sup>22</sup>. Yet, also in this example, the theme is presented by musical means that, as far as the sacred elements are concerned, count on a knowledge of these musical traditions and thus at least a cultural understanding on the part of the audience.

18 Ead., *Northern Lights*, SATB chorus a cappella, Chicago 2010.

19 Joby TALBOT, *Path of Miracles*, for mixed choir, London et al. 2005.

20 For analyses of the piece, see Joy Elizabeth MEADE, *Pilgrimage and Postminimalism in Joby Talbot's Path of Miracles*, DMA diss., University of Athens 2016; Joseph STULIGROSS, *Joby Talbot's Path of Miracles: Musical and Dramatical Analysis*, DMA diss., West Virginia University 2020, for a comparison with two other compositions on the theme of the pilgrimage, Jeffery H. GOOLSBY, *A Pilgrimage Triptych: A Conductor's Guide to Three Contemporary Choral Works*, DMA diss., Texas Tech University 2018.

21 Sources used are the Bible, the »Codex Calixtinus«, *Miragres de Santiago* (with texts in Galician), *Carmina Burana*, poems by Robert Dickinson (\*1962).

22 MEADE, *Pilgrimage*, p. 3.

### 3. Transfers to secular contexts

The following two examples have a more complex conception: *Canticum Calamitatis Maritimae* by the Finn Jaako Mäntyjärvi (\*1963) refers to a disaster, the sinking of the ferry Estonia in 1994<sup>23</sup>. At the beginning, many voices are heard whispering the text »Lux aeterna luceat eis« taken from the *Requiem*, over which a textless, seemingly improvisatory vocalisation unfolds in the solo soprano; then a psalmodic recitation with a report (also in Latin) is heard, and finally the full-voiced choir intervenes with homophonic interjections (»Miserere Domine«). These layers in fact combine three musical spheres – pseudo-folklore, reminiscences of the Latin church music tradition of psalmody and the Mass for the Dead, and, thirdly, a polyphonic setting of a Latin psalm text. However, these spheres are not unambiguous quotations: The Latin text that the narrator recites is actually the news report on the disaster by the Latin radio news programme of Radio Vatican (*Nuntii Latini*). Later on in the piece, the Latin text of Psalm 106, »Qui descendunt mare in navibus« (»Those that go down the sea in ships«), is also used.

In a commentary on the work, the composer himself identifies these elements as representing respectively the individual, objective, and collective aspect:

The work is not really intended for liturgical use, but rather as a meditation involving three distinct elements: firstly, the individual aspect – the »folk song« soprano solo that begins and ends the work (and that can, but does not have to be, interpreted as the keening or lament of a sailor's widow); secondly, the objective aspect – the »precentor« intoning the bare facts of the event in newsreader style; and thirdly, the collective aspect – the extensive setting of the psalm text *Qui descendunt navibus mare in navibus* (»They that go down to the sea in ships«)<sup>24</sup>.

In fact, the pseudo-folkloric melody is a kind of distorted paraphrase of the choral melody, »Nearer my God to thee«, with which popular imagination links to the reports about the sinking of the *Titanic*.

Despite the use of *Requiem* and Psalm texts, however, the piece was not commissioned for a public commemoration of the catastrophe but was written for a choral competition, and was premiered in this context in 1998 (it bears nevertheless a dedication to the memory of the victims). It has been performed frequently since then, possibly because it functions well as a kind

<sup>23</sup> Jaakko MÄNTYJÄRVI, *Canticum Calamitatis Maritimae*, Helsinki 1998.

<sup>24</sup> Id., *Canticum Calamitatis Maritimae*. Description (1999), URL: <<https://core.musicfinland.fi/works/canticum-calamitatis-maritimae>> (06-26-2023).



of secular requiem that appeals to the empathy of the listener. However, the spiritual references are detached from a concrete, religious function and can convey grief in a more neutral or even secularised form.

*Ärkamine (Awakening)*<sup>25</sup> by Erkki-Sven Tüür (\*1959) combines mystical nature poetry by Estonian poets about the awakening of nature with Christian Easter texts, again in Latin – first with the antiphon »Haec dies« and later with the proclamation »Christ is risen«. The choir is accompanied by a chamber orchestra. Spherical instrumental sounds (like bowed metallophone sounds and flute arabesques) are used recurrently as resting points; otherwise, the orchestra often forms a restless base, whereas the choir contrasts it with much calmer and clearer harmonies. The composer in his self-commentary on the piece emphasises an opening into the art-religious or the universal:

Awakening like waking up from sleep, waking to a new life, the awakening of dulled senses to clarity, religious awakening, the wakening of nature in spring [...] this word has an extremely profound and extensive field of meaning. I believe that awakening can be viewed as a life-long process, contrary to falling asleep and fading away. While composing this piece I lingered deeply on the level of instincts and senses, I let the text form strips of melody without fearing that they might occasionally resemble Estonian folk songs, Gregorian chant or something I used to write for the prog-rock band *In Spe*. The task of the orchestra is to surround the choir with a constantly changing »aura«, the intensity, colour and transparency of which moves from one extreme to another. From a musical perspective, this composition can also be viewed as an awakening to the light<sup>26</sup>.

In other choral works, Tüür also dealt with spiritual themes and Christian texts. He often used Latin texts (including a *Requiem* and the *Excitatio ad contemplandum*, based on a text by Anselm of Canterbury). His preference for Latin is probably due to the greater comprehensibility of it compared to his own national language and its reference to spiritual themes. Tüür consciously updates medieval references and juxtaposes musical contrasts; an actual religious orientation can also be discerned in several of his works<sup>27</sup>. Nevertheless, Tüür's *Ärkamine* belongs to a secular context, as it has been written as a

25 Erkki-Sven Tüür, *Ärkamine*, for mixed choir and chamber orchestra, Leipzig et al. 2013; recording: Estonian Philharmonic Chamber Choir, Riga Sinfonietta, conductor Daniel Reiss, CD *Ärkamine* (Ondine 2011), also available on the publisher's webpage.

26 See the program note, Vocal and choral-music, published by Erkki-Sven Tüür, URL: <<https://www.erkkisven.com/worklist-and-reviews/vocal-and-choral-music/>> (06-26-2023).

27 On Tüür's choral works and their aesthetics, see Jörn Peter HIEKEL, Harmonie und Irritation. Zu Erkki-Sven Tüürs Chorwerken, in: Hans-Klaus JUNGHEINRICH (ed.), Schwarze Milch und bunte Steine. Der Komponist Erkki-Sven Tüür, Frankfurt a.M. 2008, pp. 11–22.

commission for the opening of Riga's 2011 UNESCO »Capital of Culture« year, as part of a cultural programme aimed at showcasing the local cultural identity, which, as in the other Baltic states, is shaped by the complex relationship with Christian traditions mentioned above.

#### 4. Representativ transfers and their reception: *ARCHE* by Jörg Widmann

Widmann's *ARCHE*<sup>28</sup>, the final example, also has an official context, but this time from Germany. The oratorio (which explicitly bears this genre designation) was commissioned for the inauguration of the Elbphilharmonie in 2017, the prestigious new concert hall of the city of Hamburg. The text here is collaged from a variety of philosophical and literary texts. The work is organised in five parts: from creation (1.) and the destruction of the Deluge (2.) through human love (3.) and the Apocalypse with a clash of Good and Evil (4.) to a search for redemption, which ends with a plea for peace (5.). However, there is no God to answer man's search. The theme of the oratorio can therefore be understood as a description of a secularised form of human existence. Nonetheless, the textual sources continue to draw directly and indirectly from a body of religious and, specifically, Christian references. (The composer is even reported to have intended this concept to represent »the course of human history – or, more narrowly, the history of the West and of ›enlightened‹ Christian Europe«<sup>29</sup>.) For his setting of the *Dies Irae* (the traditional sequence in the *Requiem*), for example, Widmann uses a highly impressive, theatrical setting which could compete with the impressive Requiem settings of nineteenth-century composers like Berlioz or Verdi that today's concert audiences may be familiar with. Widmann says elsewhere that he also uses more unusual languages because of their sound qualities – so the Vulgate Latin (in *Versuch über die Fuge*) has an archaic connotation for him<sup>30</sup>. A language layer can also be used as a strong contrast, such as the *Dies irae* in *ARCHE* as an »aggressive strophic song«, while the transition from vocalise to song with text in the

28 Jörg WIDMANN, *ARCHE*. Ein Oratorium für Soli, Chor und Orchester, Mainz 2016.

29 Recording: Marlis Petersen, Thomas E. Bauer, Gabriel Böer, Jonna Plathe, Bariz Özden, Iveta Apkalna, Philharmonisches Staatsorchester Hamburg, Chor der Hamburger Staatsoper, Audi Jugendchorakademie, Hamburger Alsterspatzen, conductor Kent Nagano, ECM 2018. Citation recorded in the essay by Dieter REXROTH, Beginning and no end, in: Liner notes to the CD *ARCHE*, pp. 19–24, at p. 19.

30 Surprisingly, Widmann describes his perception of the verb »stat« as »almost like something Middle High German« (»fast etwas Mittelhochdeutsches«), see Jörg WIDMANN, »Für meine Generation ist erst mal wieder alles möglich«, in: Stephan MOESCH (ed.), *Komponieren für Stimme. Von Monteverdi bis Rihm*, Kassel et al. 2017, pp. 370–375, at p. 375.

third movement realizes a shift into the human sphere (from the dove of peace to the representation of a woman)<sup>31</sup>. Music from his opera *Babylon* (from the flood scene there) has been reused in *ARCHE*, because it represents the topos of the »re-growth of remains after a catastrophe«<sup>32</sup>. There are also several transfers of spiritual references, such as the transfer of sacred vocal genres to instrumental music, in other compositions by Widmann. Altogether, the picture that emerges is one of a very deliberate combination of heterogeneous elements in his works but of placing the possible sacred references in a context that is desacralised in a modern, post-Enlightenment sense, and thus of treating the themes in more general and humanist perspective. This is particularly evident in Widmann's statements on *ARCHE*<sup>33</sup>: The work, at least in parts of *The Deluge* and the *Dies Irae*, is »the denial of a vindictive God [...] it denies that we are meant, in our lifetimes, to walk the earth in suffering and guilt from dread of a vindictive God«.

Even more significant for our discussion is yet the last movement, *Dona nobis pacem*, because it imagines self-redemption in a rather striking way. The final plea for peace is uttered by the children's voices, symbolising a (utopian) future. At the beginning, a chorus of children can be heard calling out names of corporations (such as Facebook, Google), political institutions (like the NATO) and conflicts in alphabetical order – but then a solo boy's voice enters, followed by a contrapuntal, traditional boys' chorus movement reciting the plea for peace »Dona nobis pacem« (familiar from the Christian mass text), into which the full chorus gradually also joins, pushing into a monumental intensification that could perhaps be described as a symphonised Handel idiom. Despite the work's claimed enlightened and humane stance, the statement of the last movement (5.) remains still remarkably ambiguous: the »Dona nobis pacem« of the last movement is heard as a plea without naming a recipient. Although there are other quotations in this movement that call on the people to take action of their own (»No, place your hope in yourselves«,<sup>34</sup> in response to the previously heard slogan »In God we trust«; »Peoples, learn to live dangerously, build houses that swim, build cities that float« by Pieter Sloterdijk, here easily referable to the real building), after another »Dona nobis pacem« section (now in the form of a canon), a boy's solo voice with German text addresses God directly (»Gib uns Frieden, gütiger Gott«<sup>35</sup>). The short interpolation »Dein Gott – mein Gott – unser Gott« (»Your God – my

31 Ibid., pp. 373f.

32 Cf. on *Babylon*, the relationships between works and the composer's humanizing attitude, Florian BESTHORN, *Echo – Spiegel – Labyrinth. Der musikalische Körper im Werk Jörg Widmanns*, Würzburg 2018, esp. pp. 405f.

33 Statements cited in the essay by REXROTH, *Beginning and no end*, p. 21.

34 WIDMANN, *ARCHE*, score p. 323.

35 Ibid., p. 334f., my translation.

God – our God«<sup>36</sup>) avoids a claim to exclusivity. Nevertheless, at the end of the text we see an appeal to a counterpart and not the mere self-empowerment postulated by the composer. For the audience, however, it is perhaps above all the apotheotic sound of the finale that suggests that peace is attainable. Thus, the composer creates an attitude for his oratorio that seems intended to accommodate the public concert context with as little tension as possible. Although it is a representative genre that deals with fundamental themes of human existence and makes use of meaningful spiritual references, it avoids a too concrete religious positioning or even the expression of Christian beliefs.

Furthermore, it is instructive that the composer claims to have been inspired to devise *ARCHE* in its actual form by his experience of the concert hall under construction, that the hall had a »sacred aura« and breathed »the spirit of democracy«<sup>37</sup>. With all due caution about such selfportrayals (and their reproduction in the accompanying material of the commercial recording), the ideal of the concert experience as a secularised and inclusive ritual is thus confirmed quite explicitly. This utopian claim is underscored by an illustration in the booklet, which shows a view of the concert hall in which the ranks of the audience and the performers on the podium and on various other levels come close to each other. The larger context is also remarkable: *ARCHE* was planned as a representative work with an official function for the city that commissioned it, and the opening of the Elbphilharmonie was a very important event in terms of cultural policy. With such a work, an astonishing self-confidence is expressed: The concert hall is elevated to the status of an »ark«, the tradition of concert listening is genuinely reaffirmed in an art-religious sense, and, for the connoisseur, even specific cultural traditions of the city can become recognisable, where, with Georg Philipp Telemann and Carl Philipp Emanuel Bach in the 18th century, music directors worked who established oratorio performances as an element of civic culture.

Critical reception of the work was ambivalent, with some seeing it as a successful actualisation of the genre with concrete contemporary references, while others considered it eclectic and trivialising. The use of references to express Widmann's claim to the liberating power of human autonomy seems to work for Christoph Wurzle:

[In the *Dies Irae*] the divine judgement advances inexorably, but Widmann again raises an objection and ends this section on a note of compromise. In the spirit of a reconciliatory utopia, he underlays the music of Beethoven's *Choral Fantasy* (in the tone of

<sup>36</sup> Ibid., p. 336f.

<sup>37</sup> Cited in REXROTH, Beginning and no end, p. 19.

a predecessor to his *Ninth Symphony*) [which is cited in *ARCHE*] with a passage from Schiller's *Ode to Joy*, which Beethoven did not use, culminating in the demand: »Destroy our book of guilt! Reconcile the whole world!« Widmann may well know that forgiveness, reconciliation and peace are not so easy to achieve. But he claims for his art, for his music, a cathartic ambition. Thus, at the end of the fifth part, he has the children formulate a plea for peace. »Dona nobis pacem«, sings a boy soprano, a very moving performance by the unfortunately unnamed soloist from a boys' choir in Dortmund. And because this peace is only a hope, the final chord remains unresolved<sup>38</sup>.

Two other critics explicitly take up the claim of the »sacred aura« of the concert space; Marko Frei (*Abendzeitung*, Munich) takes a reserved stance:

After its premiere, the work was received ambivalently, either as too eclectic or as a rather questionable score. In five parts, Widmann tells a kind of creation story, including the Flood and Noah's Ark. According to Widmann, he was inspired by Hamburg's »Elphi«, which looks like a ship. On the other hand, the large concert hall has a sacred aura, hence the oratorio genre. And because Widmann likes to bring disparate things together, he gallops through cultural history. [...] In the final »Dona nobis pacem«, buzzwords are shouted to suggest a criticism of contemporary issues: Facebook and Google, Nato and the UN, Syria and debt reduction. The great idea of creating a new oratorio has been reduced to a tiresome, hollow level<sup>39</sup>.

In contrast, Eleonore Büning's description (*Frankfurter Allgemeine Zeitung*) emphasises the »familiarity« with the references drawn from tradition:

At the end, a boy singer from Dortmund with a golden voice intones the »Dona nobis pacem«, and everyone joins in, state orchestra and choirs, rising to their feet in jubilation, until the many clever children, guarantors of the future, call on us not to ask God for peace, but to improve ourselves: As true as it is platitudinous, as kitschy as it is pathetic, and enormously effective. [...] [The audience] were introduced to new music that is so old that they immediately »recognized« it<sup>40</sup>.

The critic welcomes this as a positive effect.

38 Christoph WURZEL, In Widmanns Arche hat vieles Platz: Tiefgründiges ebenso wie Humor, in: *Bachtrack*, 15.01.2017, URL: <[https://bachtrack.com/de\\_DE/kritik-urauffuehrung-joerg-widmann-arche-phiharmonisches-staatsorchester-hamburg-nagano-petersen-bauer-hamburg-elbphilharmonie-januar-2017](https://bachtrack.com/de_DE/kritik-urauffuehrung-joerg-widmann-arche-phiharmonisches-staatsorchester-hamburg-nagano-petersen-bauer-hamburg-elbphilharmonie-januar-2017)> (06-26-2023), my translation.

39 Marko FREI, Kent Nagano dirigiert »Arche« von Jörg Widmann, in: *Abendzeitung*, 15.1.2017, my translation.

40 Eleonore BUENING, Hamburg rast vor Begeisterung, in: *Frankfurter Allgemeine Zeitung*, 16.01.2017, my translation.

## 5. Conclusion

The importance of music as a cultural memory is certainly very strong in all the examples discussed. The reference to the traditions of older sacred music in performance and composition remains accessible and understandable, even in works that take a secular stance. There are practical reasons, too: Especially in choral music, a much older repertoire continues to be cultivated and used for concerts, and many ensembles are active in both concert and church-related contexts. These materials also continue to be available for creating new works. The creative approach of referencing sacred traditions can therefore draw on rich material but use it in a desacralized way or recombine it to create new meanings. All of these works use Latin texts. It could be argued that, while this is a popular choral language (given its extensive use in vocal repertoire), it is also an obvious carrier of Western European cultural references and possibly a signal of spirituality in a very abstract sense.

Jeffers Engelhardt explains the success of Arvo Pärt's music as an expression of a widespread receptivity to a »culturalised form of religion« that embraces Christian Europe above all as a resource of tradition and belonging<sup>41</sup>. In this context, it was precisely the archaising elements that functioned as constituents of an overarching »post-ideological, non-essentialised Christian cultural memory«<sup>42</sup>. In other works, such as those discussed here, and even in a different political-historical context such as the opening of the Hamburg concert hall, the mechanisms in the use of originally more sacred references seem to operate in a similar way. This is likely to explain the particular suitability of these works for manifestations such as the Capital of Culture celebrations or the self-assertion of urban cultural identity. Here, social rituals are based on a specific cultural memory that incorporates sacred elements but transfers their original meaning to a broader significance. They become more abstract common values or symbolise fundamental and existential issues.

41 Jeffers ENGELHARDT, Arvo Pärt and the Idea of a Christian Europa: The Musical Religion, in: Jeffers ENGELHARDT / Philip V. BOHLMAN (eds.) *Resounding Transcendence. Transitions in Music, Religion, and Ritual*, Oxford 2016, pp. 214–232, at p. 231.

42 *Ibid.*, p. 222.

Lucyna Przybylska

## The Proliferation of Crosses in Post-Communist Poland

### 1. Introduction

The cross is the most important symbol of Christianity, well-rooted in the Polish landscape through the ages. It became more popular after 1989, when the first post- and non-communist government in Central Europe was established. The purpose of the chapter is to identify, describe and interpret the proliferation of crosses in post-communist Poland (1989–2022). It is argued that the cross had been present before the Great Transformation of 1989, yet to a lesser degree. To be more precise, it is the Latin cross that will be examined because such a cross is common in the landscape due to the fact that Catholics predominate in the religious structure of Poland. This chapter contributes to the geography of religion, a subdiscipline of human geography that focuses on the visible dimensions of religious activity and the impact of religion on landscape<sup>1</sup>. Presenting the worldwide Christian tradition of erecting crosses and providing an analysis of the term »sacralization« with respect to space, this contribution analyses the typical forms of crosses, the determinants of their occurrence and the perception of crosses in post-communist Poland. In doing so, this chapter draws upon the data collected over twenty years of studying the spatial dimensions of religion in Poland, including material from my PhD thesis<sup>2</sup> as well as from two research projects, supported by the National Science Centre, Poland. One of the projects (2012–2014) regarded the sacralization of public spaces in Poland, and the other one crosses erected along Polish roads, at the sites of fatal car accidents (2017–2020)<sup>3</sup>.

The proliferation of crosses in post-communist Poland has been analysed using a mapping sentence, which is a definitional scheme, not a map. A mapp-

- 1 Chris C. PARK, *Sacred Worlds. An Introduction to Geography and Religion*, London et al. 1994, pp. 1–332, at pp. 18f.
- 2 Lucyna PRZYBYLSKA, *Zróżnicowanie przestrzeni sakralnej Gdyni*, Pelplin et al. 2008, pp. 1–144.
- 3 Ead., *A mapping sentence for the process of sacralisation. The case study of Gdynia*, in: *Prace Geograficzne* 137 (2014), pp. 115–135; ead., *Sakralizacja przestrzeni publicznych w Polsce*, Gdańsk 2014; ead., *Roadside memorial crosses in Poland. A form of sacralization of public spaces*, in: *Siedlungsforschung. Archäologie – Geschichte – Geographie* 33 (2016), pp. 245–264; ead., *Are Roadside Crosses in Poland a Religious or Cultural Expression?*, in: *Religions* 12/1 (2021), pp. 1–14.

ing sentence is a linguistically based approach adopted from the facet theory developed by sociologist Louis Guttman and recently promoted by psychologist Paul Hackett<sup>4</sup>. The facet theory is an approach to social research designed for inquiries into complex multivariate events, whereas a mapping sentence states a research domain's contents in terms of its important facets, elements of these facets and connects these facets using everyday connective language to suggest the relationship between the facets<sup>5</sup>. Mapping sentences help to develop a conceptual framework or template for the variables that constitute the research domain that is under investigation. They provide a semantic structure for the findings. They also proved to be a useful tool when describing determinants, aspects and forms of the multidimensional process of landscape sacralization<sup>6</sup>.

## 2. The Christian tradition of erecting crosses and the process of sacralization

In ancient times, the condemned were nailed to crosses standing on hills or along roads in order to scare passers-by away from committing a crime<sup>7</sup>. According to the Bible, the same happened to Jesus Christ. At first, Christians did not use the cross, which was associated exclusively with executions. The material sign of the cross started to be commonly used by the followers of the new religion in the Roman Empire in the 4th century, when they became free to profess their faith, and next in the times of the medieval crusades to Jerusalem, organised to seize holy places and retrieve the most sacred relic – the cross on which Jesus had been crucified.

As Christianity was spreading over Europe, crosses were not only commonly used in liturgy and as a symbol of power, sacredness, and a connection between God and people. Crosses also started to permeate everyday life<sup>8</sup>. They were placed in market squares where decrees were announced, justice was administered and oaths were taken. Crosses marked the boundaries of fields

4 Paul M. W. HACKETT, *Facet Theory and the Mapping Sentence. Evolving Philosophy, Use and Application*, Basingstoke et al. 2014, pp. 1–113; id., *Facet Theory and the Mapping Sentence. Evolving Philosophy, Use and Declarative Applications*, Cham<sup>2</sup>2021, pp. 1–277.

5 HACKETT, *Facet Theory and the Mapping Sentence*, p. 246.

6 PRZYBYLSKA, *A mapping sentence for the process of sacralisation*, p. 131; ead., *Sakralizacja przestrzeni publicznych w Polsce*, p. 100.

7 Stanisław KOBIELUS, *Krzyż Chrystusa. Od znaku i figury do symbolu i metafory*, Kraków 2011, pp. 1–320, at pp. 17–21; Dariusz OSTROWSKI, *Znak nadziei. Opowieść o polskich krzyżach*, Kraków 2010, pp. 1–142, at p. 6.

8 KOBIELUS, *Krzyż Chrystusa*, pp. 157–182.



and commemorated important events or (more often) people. In the Middle Ages, it was common practice to fund stone conciliation crosses, placed by the wrong-doers themselves at the site of the crime to mark it as damned and dangerous, as the victim's soul might still be wandering there. As the cross was supposed to protect people from evil, it was also erected at crossroads because it was believed that demons often stayed in such places. Moreover, in late Antiquity and the early Middle Ages, the cross was treated as a tool of God's special protection, too. Therefore, it was carved on tombstones, worn around the neck as a pendant, pinned on clothes and helmets, put into graves, as well as on the covers of and inside manuscripts.

With the cross being a ubiquitous symbol, the landscape of Europe started to change during the Reformation period. From the 16th century onwards, small sacral architecture did not develop as rapidly in the countries, which supported Martin Luther and other reformers as it did in Catholic countries. The American geographer Chris Park has suggested the term *roadside religious landscape* for visible symbols of faith, including crucifixes and wayside crosses, and chapels<sup>9</sup>. These symbols have been popular in Roman-Catholicism and the Eastern Orthodox Church but rare in predominantly Protestant regions<sup>10</sup>. Urszula Janicka-Krzywda, a Polish folklorist, considers three main motives for founding a roadside cross or shrine: (1.) as an antidote to all non-material evil; (2.) as a monument, reminder or message for future generations; (3.) as an expression of repentance, a kind of supplication or thanksgiving prayer<sup>11</sup>. In his analysis of memorial foundations, Jan Adamowski distinguishes three main commemorative purposes, i.e., to commemorate historical-national events, events related to religion and Church, and personal-familial occasions<sup>12</sup>. He concludes that »in practice, the motives behind the foundation of roadside crosses and shrines frequently have a syncretic character«<sup>13</sup>.

The old custom of erecting crosses has been continued in regions of Christian traditions. Crosses of different sizes can be found in a variety of places: by the road and on hilltops, on top of, next to and inside sacral buildings, in houses as well as, in some countries (Germany, Italy, Poland), in public utility buildings. Many can be defined as memorial crosses because they were erected in order to memorialise an idea, event or person. Among the smallest

9 PARK, *Sacred Worlds*, p. 200.

10 Ibid.; Jon MATHIEU, *The sacralization of Mountains in Europe during the Modern Age*, in: *Mountain Research and Development* 26/4 (2006), pp. 343–349, at p. 345.

11 Urszula JANICKA-KRZYWDA, *Kapliczki i krzyże przydrożne polskiego Podkarpacia*, Warszawa 1999, pp. 1–77, at p. 10.

12 Jan ADAMOWSKI, *Motywacje stawiania krzyży i kapliczek przydrożnych*, in: Id. / Marta WÓJCICKA (eds.), *Krzyże i kapliczki przydrożne jako znaki społecznej, kulturowej i religijnej pamięci*, Lublin 2011, pp. 17–41.

13 Ibid., p. 41.

ones, there are crosses commemorating victims of fatal road accidents<sup>14</sup>, while the tallest cross in the world stands about 50 kilometres from Madrid. It is an element of the *Valle de los Caídos* complex, built between 1940 and 1959 in commemoration of the Spanish Civil War. The cross stands on a hill and is 152.4 metres in height and about 46 metres in width. It must be emphasised that apart from being places of cult, religious sites often perform other functions as well, such as integrating the society or manifesting power<sup>15</sup>. This has always been very much the case with regard to crosses.

The Christian tradition of erecting crosses can be seen as a form of landscape sacralization or sacralization of public spaces. Sacralization may be viewed either dynamically, as a process, or statically, as an expression of religious phenomena in public spaces<sup>16</sup>. For geographers Havlíček and Hupková<sup>17</sup>, sacralization is »a process leading to an increase in sacred manifestations«. Both sacralizing and desacralizing processes may involve not only space but other categories as well, such as people, language, things, or institutions. It was assumed that with respect to landscape and public places, the sacralizing processes denote quantitative and qualitative proliferation, multiplication and the development of the sacred sphere. In contrast, the desacralizing processes lead to degradation, limitation, or even the elimination of sacredness from the environment<sup>18</sup>. The crosses are a visual manifestation of religion in a space, which is referred to by geographers of religion as »sacred space«<sup>19</sup>, »religious landscape«<sup>20</sup>, »religious space«<sup>21</sup>, or just »sacred structures«, quoted in a study focused on rural areas in Czechia<sup>22</sup>. In other words, sacralization means creating a religious landscape. It has been assumed that the formation of any religious landscape occurs in a situation when there is the need to express faith

14 Holly EVERETT, *Roadside Crosses in Contemporary Memorial Culture*, Denton 2002, pp. 1–145; Robert Matej BEDNAR, *Road scars. Trauma, Memory, and Automobility*, Lanham 2020, pp. 1–256; PRZYBYLSKA, *Are Roadside Crosses in Poland a Religious or Cultural Expression?*, pp. 1–14.

15 Ead./Mariusz CZEPczyński, *Landscape sacralisation in post-communist Poland*, in: *Scottish Geographical Journal* 133/1 (2017), pp. 21–41, at p. 36.

16 PRZYBYLSKA, *Roadside memorial crosses in Poland*, p. 246.

17 Tomáš HAVLÍČEK / Martina HUPKOVÁ, *Sacred Structures in the Landscape. The Case of Rural Czechia*, in: *Scottish Geographical Journal* 129/2 (2013), pp. 100–121, at p. 100.

18 PRZYBYLSKA, *Sakralizacja przestrzeni publicznych w Polsce*, p. 22–31; ead./CZEPczyński, *Landscape sacralisation in post-communist Poland*, p. 34.

19 Roger W. STUMP, *The Geography of Religion. Faith, Place and Space*, Maryland 2008, pp. 1–423, at p. 25.

20 PARK, *Sacred Worlds*, p. 201.

21 Ewa KLIMA, *Przestrzeń religijna miasta, Łódź 2011*, pp. 1–426, at p. 14.

22 HAVLÍČEK / HUPKOVÁ, *Sacred Structures in the Landscape*, p. 100.

and an opportunity to do so<sup>23</sup>. The former is an internal factor and depends on religiosity, while the latter is closely related to politics, economy, environment, demographics, and culture, including the tradition of place (*genius loci*)<sup>24</sup>.

The terms »religious landscape« or »sacred space«, applied by geographers, refer to numerous expressions of the spatial activity of *homo religiosus*. The systematisation of such manifestations in post-communist Poland resulted in distinguishing three categories of sacralization: architectural, linguistic, and seasonal<sup>25</sup>. Generally, the cross is a part of architectural sacralization, which is the process of filling the landscape with objects referred to as sacred architecture, such as churches, chapels, religious orders' houses, figures of the saints, and other sacred structures. However, the cross is sometimes present in linguistic and seasonal sacralization, too. The number of religion-related place names (mostly street names) has been growing in Poland since 1990. They mostly include the names of saints and clergymen. The name of the cross rarely appears in a place name – the Holy Cross roundabout in Rzeszów (the capital of a south-eastern province) is a very uncommon example of such a name. Seasonal sacralization manifests itself in religious rituals, usually held annually, such as processions, pilgrimages, festivals, and open-air church services. The cross is a central cult object during the »Stations of the Cross« – public processions commonly organised during the time of Lent, all over Poland. However, this chapter presents the cross exclusively as a part of architectural sacralization. In the author's opinion, the material image of the cross is more varied and more visually and permanently accessible in post-communist Poland than the cross as an element of linguistic and seasonal sacralization. As it was mentioned above, the religious sites, including crosses, often perform other than religious functions as well. It seems that the material image of the cross is a better integrator of the society and manifestation of power than more ephemeral forms of place names and temporal celebrations.

### 3. A mapping sentence for the proliferation of crosses

Figure 1 is a mapping sentence, which emphasises different components of the proliferation of crosses thesis in post-communist Poland. It can be used to describe and interpret, step by step, the complex phenomenon of visual manifestation of religion in public spaces. The form of a mapping sentence defines the research domain as well as enables us to explore its facets. They are marked in Figure 1 with capital letters: A – forms, including A1 – size

23 PRZYBYLSKA, A mapping sentence for the process of sacralisation, p. 115.

24 Ead., Sakralizacja przestrzeni publicznych w Polsce, pp. 73–103.

25 Ibid., p. 15; ead., A mapping sentence for the process of sacralisation, p. 117.

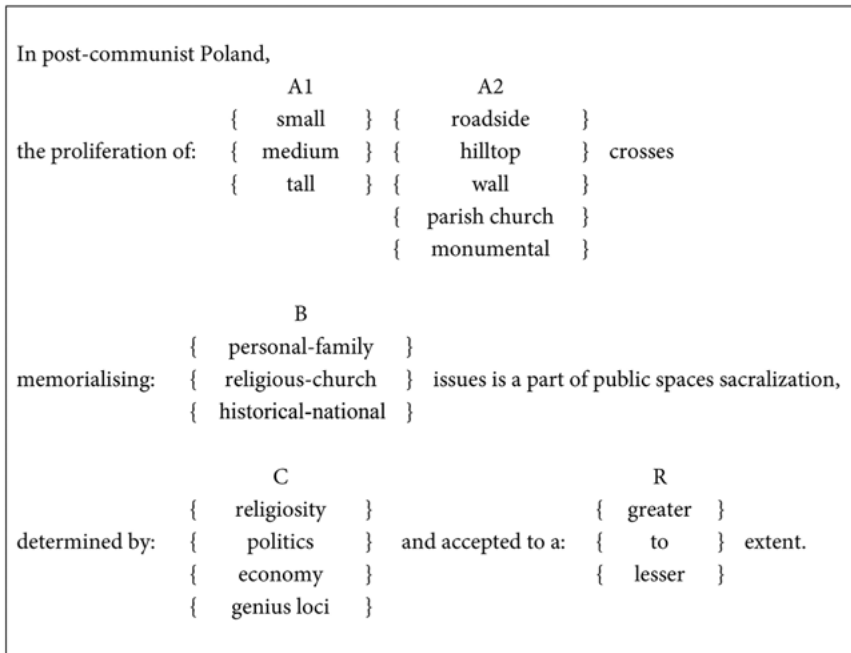


Figure 1: A mapping sentence for the proliferation of crosses in post-communist Poland; Source: Author's own study

and A2 – location, B – motivation, C – determinants, and R – perception. A comprehensive study of the listed elements consisted of the following parts: firstly, different forms of crosses that became common in post-communist Poland were presented in detail (A). This was followed by a typology of memorialisation motives (B). The next step consisted of the identification of the determinants of the process of sacralization of public spaces (C), of which crosses were an integral part. Finally, the range of perception (R) was discussed, based on the question of whether crosses are accepted or not and why?

### 3.1 Forms (A1–A2)

With regard to size, we may distinguish between small, medium-sized, and tall crosses (A1). Small ones include those, which surmount churches, chapels and roadside shrines put at the sites of fatal car accidents, as well as those, which hang on the walls in public schools and offices. Larger crosses can be found next to parish churches, on private property, and at crossroads. As they

represent the long-standing tradition of erecting roadside crosses, I call them traditional crosses or traditional roadside crosses. In Poland, they became especially popular in the 17th century due to the introduction of the Counter-Reformation by the Roman Catholic Church and the peasants' rising living standard<sup>26</sup>. It must be emphasised that the term »monumental crosses« matches both, very tall crosses, and medium-sized monuments in the shape of the cross, commemorating events from the history of Poland or/and the Roman Catholic Church. Both forms of monuments can be found in public squares, on local hilltops, or in the mountains.

In Poland, there are two kinds of crosses present in the roadscape: traditional crosses, about four-metres-tall, which had been erected for various reasons through the ages, as well as small crosses, usually well under one-metre-tall, constructed for only one reason: to commemorate fatal road accidents<sup>27</sup>. Both types are either wooden, stone or metal crosses, plain crosses or crucifixes. The uniqueness of the Polish roadside landscape lies in the huge number of crosses. A cross erected at the site of a fatal car crash is statistically observed every sixth kilometre along Polish main roads<sup>28</sup>. It should be noted that the cross is the main form of over 90% of roadside death memorials. The origins of spontaneously erected, cross-shaped reminders of fatal accidents are rooted in the old Christian tradition of putting up crosses and chapels by roads. Medium-sized roadside crosses of this type are numerous – they can be encountered every seventh kilometre.

It is hard to estimate the spread of roadside crosses in post-communist Poland. Research on traditional roadside crosses and shrines used to ignore the quantitative aspect<sup>29</sup>. However, it can be assumed that old sacred structures have always been renovated, the difference being that nowadays people do not need to be afraid of political repressions or act during the night. It is typical of a roadside cross to have the year of erection inscribed. The author has seen dates from the 1990s and 2000s, both in rural and urban areas, indirectly proving the proliferation of roadside crosses or, at least, the constant care about them. An example of a roadside cross commemorates the most tragic road accident in Poland, in which 32 people lost their lives in a bus crash on the outskirts of Gdańsk, in 1994. Three years later, on the initiative of Gdańsk authorities, a monument was unveiled, erected by the road where

26 JANICKA-KRZYWDA, *Kapliczki i krzyże przydrożne polskiego Podkarpacia*, p. 6.

27 PRZYBYLSKA, *Are Roadside Crosses in Poland a Religious or Cultural Expression?*, p. 5.

28 Ead., *Roadside memorial crosses in Poland*, p. 252.

29 TADEUSZ SEWERYN, *Kapliczki i krzyże przydrożne w Polsce*, Warszawa 1958, pp. 1–213; JANICKA-KRZYWDA, *Kapliczki i krzyże przydrożne polskiego Podkarpacia*; JAN ADAMOWSKI / MARTA WÓJCICKA (eds.), *Krzyże i kapliczki przydrożne jako znaki społecznej, kulturowej i religijnej pamięci*, Lublin 2011, pp. 1–319.

the accident had taken place<sup>30</sup>. It is a granite vertical slab with the names of all the casualties inscribed on it. Right behind it, there is a crucifix – a typical traditional roadside cross.

Although monumental crosses proliferated in the post-communist period, crosses of this type had appeared already earlier in the Polish landscape. For example, a 15-metres-tall structure has been built in the Tatra mountains, on the top of Mount Giewont (1,894 metres) in 1901. It was erected by the local people inspired by the stories about the tradition of placing jubilee crosses on Italian hilltops, told by the local parish priest. After John Paul II mentioned the cross in Zakopane in public, in 1997, its replicas started to appear in various places, mainly in the south of the country, but also in central Poland (Pola Lednickie) and in the north (Sopot, Pustkowo)<sup>31</sup>.

Similar to the Giewont cross, another »mountain cross« easily recognisable by Poles can be found on Tarnica (1,346 metres) in the Bieszczady Mountains. A new, eight-metres-tall steel structure, erected »to commemorate the Great Jubilee of the year 2000 and the pontificate of the Polish Pope Karol Wojtyła – John Paul II« in 2000, replaced a smaller cross standing at this site since 1979. The crosses, which stand out from all the monumental millennium crosses erected on local hills or in the mountains to symbolise 2000 years of Christianity are those in the cities of Bielsko-Biała (over 40 metres), Przemyśl (22 metres), Gdańsk (16 metres), or on Chełmiec Mountain (45 metres) in south-western Poland and in the south eastern *gmina* of Ropczyce (47 metres)<sup>32</sup>. The last of the mentioned crosses is the tallest one. It has a glass observation deck installed at the height of 30 metres, which can be reached by an elevator.

There are also medium-sized hilltop crosses. An example here are Calvary crosses, standing on Góra Trzech Krzyży (Three Crosses Mountain) in the village of Parchatka (Fig. 2) and in the town of Kazimierz Dolny, dating back to the beginning of the 19th and 18th century respectively. In general, the oldest crosses in the Polish mountains come from the 19th century, including the cross in the Tatra built in 1809 to commemorate the fight of civil guard against a band of robbers<sup>33</sup>. Contrary to the above mentioned monumental cross on Mount Giewont, they used to be medium-sized and located in the valleys.

30 Pomnik Ofiar Katastrofy Autobusowej w Kokoszkach, in: Gdańskie Pomniki, published by Gdański Zakład Dróg i Zieleni, URL: <<https://gzdz.gda.pl/mapa/pomnik-ofiar-katastrofy-autobusowej-w-kokoszkach,o,57>> (06-12-2023).

31 OSTROWSKI, Znak nadziei, p. 78.

32 PRZYBYLSKA, Czepczyński, Landscape sacralisation in post-communist Poland, p. 34.

33 Danuta PTASZYCKA-JACKOWSKA, Sacrum w parkach narodowych w polskich Karpatach, in: Bolesław DOMAŃSKI/Stefan SKIBA (eds.), Geografia i Sacrum, vol. 2, Kraków 2005, pp. 391–402, at p. 392.



Figure 2: Three Crosses Mountain in the village of Parchatka;  
Source: Lucyna Przybylska, 2020



Figure 3: The cross in the shape of three anchors at the end of the Alley of Merited People of the Sea in Rewa; Source: Lucyna Przybylska, 2013

Monumentalism is not restricted to mountains and hills. Examples of monumental crosses at locations other than mounts and hills include the cross in the shape of three anchors, erected in 2004, overlooking the beach in the seaside resort of Rewa (Fig. 3), and a jubilee cross erected in 2017, in a newly arranged square in the eastern town of Radzyń Podlaski. The so-called Maritime Cross in Rewa was conceived by one of the inhabitants of *gmina* Kosakowo and its mayor. It replaced a wooden cross cut down by the Nazis during World War II. The cross in Radzyń Podlaski is an example of an urban public space sacralization. It bears the following inscription: *On the 1050th anniversary of the Baptism of Poland – from the grateful inhabitants of the Radzyń land. 966–2016*<sup>34</sup>. Each centimetre of the cross corresponds to one of the 1050 years, resulting in a height of 10.50 metres. However, the most famous large cross (nine metres) situated in a city centre was built in 2009 in Warsaw. It commemorates the 30th anniversary of John Paul II's celebration of a Holy Mass for half a million people gathered in Piłsudski Square.

34 Anna WASAK, Stał Krzyż Jubileuszowy na skwerze 1050-lecia Chrztu Polski – zaproszenie na poświęcenie, 08.04.2017, in: Informacje, published by Urząd Miasta Radzyń Podlaski, URL: <<https://www.radzyn-podl.pl/miasto/aktualnosci/9-informacje/1306-stanal-krzyz-jubileuszowy-na-skwerze-1050-lecia-chrztu-polski-zaproszenie-na-poswiecenie.html>> (06-12-2023).



Finally, there are also medium-sized, usually wooden crosses, situated next to churches. They are called »mission crosses« because they have been put in memory of folk missions, held traditionally every ten years. The purpose of these »holy missions« has been to deepen people's faith. The proliferation of mission crosses can be calculated based on the number of parishes in Poland because the erection of a parish unit always resulted in the construction of a parish church and each Catholic church used to have a mission cross nearby. The territory of Poland had been filled with over 1,000 churches and, consequently, with as many mission crosses in the years 1946–1979, then with over 1,500 in the 1980s<sup>35</sup>, and, finally, over 1,600 churches and mission crosses were constructed in the post-communist period. In the recent decade (2010–2020), the need for parish churches has decreased. However, over 100 new parishes remain an impressive number, especially when we consider the proliferation of desacralized churches in Western Europe. Furthermore, there are church roofs and towers, traditionally decorated with small crosses. Thus, the overall number of »parish church crosses« in the Polish landscape should be at least doubled.

Coming to the end of the review of the most popular forms of crosses in post-communist Poland, one must not forget about the small crosses hanging on the walls in schools, town and city halls, and other public institutions. In 1997, a cross was hung in the Polish parliament<sup>36</sup>. Moreover, in the 1990s, crosses legally appeared in hospital and airport chapels. In 1993, a chapel in Warsaw Okęcie Airport was built as the first of this kind in Poland and the whole postcommunist bloc<sup>37</sup>. These wall crosses are examples of indoor sacralization of public spaces, contrary to the outdoor or landscape sacralization, discussed at length in this section.

### 3.2 Motivation (B)

The personal-family-oriented crosses can be classified as individually erected symbols of memorialisation for personal reasons. A monograph on the roadside crosses and figures in the Baltic city of Gdynia<sup>38</sup> demonstrates the proliferation of crosses in post-communist Poland. The authors distinguish two periods when sacred structures were created in large numbers. In the first years after World War II, crosses were erected in gratitude for surviving the war, and at the turn of the 21st century – for the gift of sobriety and received

35 PRZYBYLSKA, Sakralizacja przestrzeni publicznych w Polsce, p. 144.

36 KLIMA, Przestrzeń religijna miasta, p. 181.

37 PRZYBYLSKA, Sakralizacja przestrzeni publicznych w Polsce, p. 145.

38 Barbara MIKOŁAJCZUK/Monika ZAKROCZYMSKA, Gdynskie kapliczki, figury i krzyże, Gdynia 2011, pp. 1–249.

grace or for surviving four serious accidents. Similarly, roadside memorials spontaneously erected at the sites of fatal accidents exemplify typical personal-family issues hidden behind the erection of the cross. The bereaved, mostly women and declaring themselves as believers and followers of Catholic traditions, used to put a cross to memorialise their beloved's site of death<sup>39</sup>. Incorporating the cross into an informal commemoration practice balances between religious and other meanings. While in Romania, motivations to erect memorial crosses are placed at the top of the religious – non-religious scale, in the cases of Czechia and other so-called Western countries the purely religious reasons are considerably weaker than other, non-religious or quasi-religious motivations<sup>40</sup>. Based on religious rituals observed at memorial crosses, Poland ranks approximately in the middle of the scale of religious to non-religious motivations<sup>41</sup>.

The crosses on Parchatka Mountain show the permanence of the symbol of the cross at a given site and, at the same time, the exceptional change in the motivation to erect a cross from a personal-family to a church-religious and/or a historical-national one. Originally, the crosses commemorated a countess, who died in 1822, and her two daughters. When the memory of the persons whom princess Izabela Czartoryska wanted to memorialise had faded at the end of the 19th century, the crosses were considered reminders of the cholera epidemic. They disappeared from the hill in 1945 or later, in the 1950s or 1960s. In 2006, they returned to their historical place in an architectonic design referring to the Golgotha Hill and the figure of John Paul II. It was an initiative of a priest involved in the local society for the protection of cultural heritage. Andrzej Pawłowski<sup>42</sup> argues that the reference of the middle cross to the pope (bent crossbeam resembling the papal crozier) adds new, present-day content and refers to the activity of princess Czartoryska, the founder of the first national museum in the country and a propagator of commemorating great Poles.

Some of the oldest crosses in the Tatra mountains are both an expression of religiosity and patriotism. They promote historical-national issues, for example, the cross of Pol named after the initiator professor Wincenty Pol, a poet,

39 Lucyna PRZYBYLSKA, *Krzyże powypadkowe przy drogach w Polsce*, Pelplin 2022, pp. 1–250; ead./Małgorzata FLAGA, The anonymity of roadside memorials in Poland, in: *Mortality* 25/2 (2019), pp. 208–219.

40 EVERETT, *Roadside Crosses in Contemporary Memorial Culture*; BEDNAR, *Road scars. Trauma, Memory, and Automobility*; Olga NEŠPOROVÁ/Irina STAHL, *Roadside memorials in the Czech Republic and Romania: Memory versus religion in two European post-communist countries*, in: *Mortality* 19/1 (2014), pp. 22–40.

41 PRZYBYLSKA, *Are Roadside Crosses in Poland a Religious or Cultural Expression?*, p. 7.

42 Andrzej PAWŁOWSKI, *Trzy krzyże nad Parchatką. Symbol w krajobrazie kulturowym Małopolskiego Przełomu Wisły*, in: *Prace Komisji Krajobrazu Kulturowego* 15 (2011), pp. 54–63.

a geographer, and a patriot. In 1852, a fieldwork with his university students unexpectedly changed into a patriotic manifestation<sup>43</sup>. Pol stopped at a grave, which he considered to be that of a legendary miller. The miller was murdered by robbers while panning for gold for the king in the Tatra mountains. As the old cross marking the death was destroyed over the centuries, Pol encouraged the students to erect a new one as we should respect and remember those who faithfully served the Polish kings. Then he ended a dispute over the inscription on the cross. He chose »I nic ponad Boga« (And nothing beyond God). The youth sang patriotic songs. Soon, Pol was accused of the lack of loyalty and then fired. The inscription was a political allusion. God's power is greater than that of the Austrian Monarchy, it is God who guides people and nations. At that time Poland was erased from the map of Europe. Pol's cross and poems popularised knowledge about the nature and history of Poland, and they are rooted deeply in the collective memory. Today, the renovated version of the cross is still present in the Tatra National Park.

It should be noted that the crosses standing on Parchatka and Tarnica Mountains, and in Piłsudski Square are examples of the numerous structures in Poland memorializing John Paul II. One of such »papal crosses« became the subject of a national and international controversy, known as the »war of the crosses« (1998–1999). In the second half of the 1980s, the cross in memory of the holy mass celebrated by John Paul II was erected on the gravel pit of the former death camp, Auschwitz. A heated dispute broke out<sup>44</sup>, concerning this large cross (eight metres) and nearly three hundred smaller crosses that Catholics from all around Poland spontaneously planted around it in its »defence«. Finally, it was agreed that the papal cross would stay in its place but all the crosses that were added later would be moved to a Franciscan monastery. In the case of the papal crosses, as well as other popular memorials to John Paul II, it is hard to identify the prevailing church-religious or historical-national issues, as the crosses express the feeling of national pride with having a »Polish Pope at the Vatican«, gratitude for his contribution to the eventual fall of communism in Poland, and the pride and thankfulness felt by local communities experiencing John Paul II's pastoral activity.

43 Antoni JACKOWSKI, Wincenty Pol – prekursor geografii religii w Polsce, in: Małgorzata ŁOBOZ (ed.), *Obrazy natury i kultura, Studia o Wincentym Polu*, Wrocław 2015, pp. 113–141, at p. 138.

44 Tomasz PŁONKOWSKI, Prasowe uniwersum/a symboliczne – jedno czy wiele? Dyskurs prasowy na temat krzyża przed Pałacem Prezydenckim na przykładzie »Gazety Polskiej« i tygodnika »Nie«, in: *Miscellanea Anthropologica et Sociologica* 13 (2012), pp. 107–121; Geneviève ZUBRZYCKI, Krzyże oświęcimskie. Nacjonalizm i religia w postkomunistycznej Polsce, in: *Ibid.*, pp. 145–166.

While religious-church reasons prevail in the mission crosses located next to parish churches, historical-national ones are typical of Katyń crosses. One of the first ones was erected in the old town of Cracow in 1990 (Fig. 4). At its foot, it has a plate with the names of martyrdom sites connected with the times of World War II, as well as the bloody events from the most recent history of Poland. In April 2010, the cross became a new memory site, both for the inhabitants of Krakow and for the official delegations paying homage to the casualties of a tragic plane disaster. The plane exploded while landing in Smolensk, Russia. All 96 people on board died, including the president of Poland, Lech Kaczyński, and other notable passengers. They were going to mark the 70th anniversary of the Katyń massacre and honour 22,000 Polish army officers executed by the Soviets in 1940. Five days after the air crash, Polish scouts put a wooden cross in front of the Presidential Palace in Warsaw. The spontaneously established memorial cross provoked a controversy; some people wanted the cross to permanently remain in front of the Palace, while others did not. Although the so-called »Smolensk cross« was finally moved to the Chapel in the Presidential Palace, new commemorative crosses or just memorial plaques proliferated all over Poland. For example, the granite cross in the southwestern town of Trzebnica replaced the old wooden Katyń cross from 1990, which was damaged by strong wind in 2014. The inscription on the beams: God, Honour, Fatherland, Katyń 1940, Smolensk 2010, is accompanied by the image of the white eagle from the coat of arms of Poland. Katyń and Smolensk crosses represent historical-national reasons, just like in the early 1990s, when crosses honouring the victims of the totalitarian system proliferated in Poland. However, it must be stressed that the first monument commemorating the victims of the communist oppression to be erected in Poland and in Eastern Europe was unveiled as early as December 1980, the Memorial to the Fallen Shipyard Workers (three 42-metres-tall steel crosses) in Gdańsk.

### 3.3 Determinants (C)

A religious society is the main driving force of public space sacralization in Poland<sup>45</sup>. In the 1930s, apart from Roman Catholics, Poland was inhabited by 12% Orthodox Church followers, 10% Greek-Catholics, 10% Jews and 2.6% Protestants<sup>46</sup>. After World War II, due to the border changes and the extermination of Polish Jews, Poland was left with a 95% Roman Catholic

45 PRZYBYLSKA, *Sakralizacja przestrzeni publicznych w Polsce*, p. 73.

46 Antoni JACKOWSKI et al., *Religie świata. Szlaki pielgrzymkowe*, Poznań 1999, pp. 1–360, at p. 35.



Figure 4: The Katyń Cross in Cracow; Source: Lucyna Przybylska, 2013

population, with small Greek Catholic, Orthodox, Protestant, Jewish and Muslim minorities<sup>47</sup>. Nowadays, the Roman Catholic Church is still the prevailing denomination. As much as 92.6% of the population belongs to the Roman Catholic Church, while other religious denominations put together make up less than 2.5%<sup>48</sup>. Although slowly declining, regular religious practices are still vital among Catholics, with about 40% attending Holy Mass and 17% receiving the Holy Communion every Sunday<sup>49</sup>. Most Poles (72%) have a cross at home<sup>50</sup>. It must be remembered that the ways of manifesting a given religion in space are related to its theology. In Poland, these manifestations are marked by the Christological, Marian, and hagiographic doctrines of Catholicism. Crosses are a part of the Christological dimension.

The role of religion in the life of Polish society is often explained through the analysis of the political history of the country. It is argued that the disappearance of the Polish state from the map of Europe in 1795 made the Roman Catholic Church the only institution capable of retaining and exerting influence in the territories occupied by Imperial Russia, Prussia, and Austria. Apart from the Polish language, the Roman Catholic Church formed the institutional link between the occupied Polish territories as well as the main repository of national identity throughout the 19th century<sup>51</sup>. The Roman Catholic Church was the cradle of the general idea of freedom in the hard times of political and religious oppression, which lead to the conclusion that »*Polish national identity and Catholicism fused together*«<sup>52</sup>. After a short period of freedom (1918–1939), Poland faced the continued denial of independence under Soviet domination. It should also be noted that desacralization in the communist era was taking place concurrently with the sacralization process, which was quite unusual for Eastern Europe at that time. On the one hand, images of crosses were often removed but on the other hand authorities sometimes allowed the building of a parish church, so as not to be accused of breaching the Constitution, which guaranteed religious freedom. Indeed,

47 David HERBERT, Religion and the »Great Transformation« in Poland and East Germany, in: Id. (ed.), Religion and Social Transformations, Ashgate 2001, pp. 13–63, at p. 14.

48 Statistical Yearbook of the Republic of Poland 2021, in: Statistical Yearbooks, published by Statistics Poland, URL: <<https://stat.gov.pl/en/topics/statistical-yearbooks/statistical-yearbooks/statistical-yearbook-of-the-republic-of-poland-2021,2,23.html>> (06-12-2023).

49 Wojciech SADŁOŃ, Differentiation, polarization and religious change in Poland at the turn of 20th and 21st century, in: Religious Studies Review 262/4 (2016), pp. 26–42, at p. 36.

50 PRZYBYLSKA, Are Roadside Crosses in Poland a Religious or Cultural Expression?, p. 7.

51 José CASANOVA, Public Religions in the Modern World, Chicago 1994, pp. 1–330 [chapter 4: Poland: From Church of the Nation to Civil Society, pp. 159–194]; HERBERT, Religion and the »Great Transformation« in Poland and East Germany, p. 39.

52 ZUBRZYCKI, Krzyże oświęcimskie, p. 163.

when the Independent Self-governing Trade Union »Solidarity« started organising strikes on a massive scale from 1980/81 onwards, also the number of churches started to grow. This parallel development reveals the weakness of the communist regime, which softened the restrictions that had previously been imposed on sacral architecture. Consequently, the material sign of the cross, as well as the Church in general, have often been associated with opposition to communist rule.

General improvement of the standard of living in Poland, resulting from the economic growth of the country, is another determinant of the sacralization process, following closely the religious and political factors. The growth of the gross domestic product brought wealth and comfort: assuming that in the year 1990 its value equalled 100, it increased to 129.5 by the year 2000, 190.3 another ten years later, to peak at 256.4 another decade later in 2020<sup>53</sup>. Economic development was possible due to the collapse of Communism and the opening of the borders after 1989, as well as to greater economic freedom after joining the European Union in 2004. As regards building places of the religious cult, the websites of individual parishes, local media and the widespread practice of placing donors' names on small plates document people's generosity, including donations from Polish emigrants. Old-style monumentalism, well reflected in crosses and other forms of sacral architecture across Poland, was also possible due to multiple new technological solutions.

Finally, the power of tradition and the unique character of a place played a significant role in some cases of landscape sacralization<sup>54</sup>. In other words, it is the identity of a place or *genius loci* that matters when it comes to the revival of a cult. *Genius loci* is »a metaphorical representation of the spirit of a place«<sup>55</sup>. Ancient Romans believed that every »independent« being has its *genius*, its guardian spirit who »gives life to people and places, accompanies them from birth to death, and determines their character or essence«<sup>56</sup>. The concept of *genius loci* seems to be an accurate explanation of many cases of erecting crosses anew and their permanence at a given site despite falling into temporary obscurity or historical turmoil. The crosses in the seaside resort of Rewa or in the village of Parchatka mirror such local traditions. In the author's opinion, in the case of Poland it is a matter of memory, religiosity and patriotism rather than environmental issues, which generate the

53 Statistics Poland, S.P.D., Statistical Yearbook of the Republic of Poland, Warszawa 2021.

54 PRZYBYLSKA/CZEPczyński, Landscape sacralisation in post-communist Poland, p. 33.

55 Laura MENATTI, Which Identity for places? A geophilosophical approach, in: Daniel BOSWELL et al. (eds.), Interculturalism, Meaning and Identity, Oxford 2013, pp. 221–231, at p. 224.

56 Christian NORBERG-SCHULZ, Existence, Space and Architecture, London 1971, pp. 1–120, at p. 18.

spirit of the place<sup>57</sup>. The new nature-based religiosity developing in Europe in the 19th century, as Mathieu<sup>58</sup> points out, did not flourish in Polish society, which was separated into three countries (Austria, Prussia, Russia) and focused on national liberation struggle at that time. The very place, where a cross has been erected, used to be remembered. Once placed, it is constantly renewed.

Today some of the monumental crosses have an environmental dimension connected to tourism. The cross on Mount Giewont, by no means designed to be a touristic attraction, enters into dialogue with masses of tourists willing to climb the mountain (which overlooks a popular resort of Zakopane) and make a selfie with the famous cross. However, »the touristic orientation of religion in contemporary Poland«<sup>59</sup> can be observed in the cases of the newly erected crosses in Rewa and Ropczyce. In Rewa, the Alley of Merited People of the Sea with the image of the Maritime Cross is presented in the official *gmina* website among local touristic attractions<sup>60</sup>. More attention is paid to the alley than the cross. The same emphasis on the Alley on a Rewa parish website is intriguing<sup>61</sup>. Is the cross a commonplace element of public iconography? The millennium cross in Ropczyce has been described in a different way. Here, the symbolism of the cross in Christianity is presented at some length. Furthermore, for the initiator of the cross, a local priest, the design of the monumental cross (as a viewpoint for admiring the panorama, together with live cameras, and an electronic indicator of the height of the glass elevator) fits into the era of technology and computerisation and the cross is better understandable in this form for a new generation of religious believers and non-believers<sup>62</sup>.

57 Geographers of religion Elżbieta Bilka-Wodecka and Izabela Soljan from the Jagiellonian University in Cracow support my statement on religious and national motivation of erecting crosses in Poland, including mountains. It seems that numerous crosses in Poland did not and do not serve as a reminder to preserve the beauty of Poland's environment. However, the environmental issues in landscape sacralization in Poland deserve further research.

58 MATHIEU, The sacralization of Mountains in Europe during the Modern Age, p. 347.

59 PRZYBYLSKA/CZEPczyński, Landscape sacralisation in post-communist Poland, p. 36.

60 Turystyka, published by Kosakowo turystycznie (Gmina Kosakowo), URL: <<https://kosakowoturystycznie.pl/kategoria/turystyka/>> (06-12-2023).

61 O parafii, Rewa – historia i terażniejszość, published by Parafia rzymskokatolicka p. w. Św. Rocha, URL: <<http://www.parafia-rewa.pl/o-parafii-34875/rewa-historia-i-terazniejszosc-34881>> (06-12-2023).

62 Opis Krzyża, published by Krzyż III tysiąclecia, URL: <<https://krzyzropczyce.pl/opis-krzyza/>> (06-12-2023).



### 3.4 Perception (R)

In general, crosses are accepted in public spaces in Poland. Regular representative opinion polls regarding attitudes to the presence of religion and the Church in public space usually include the following question: Do you approve of or object to crosses in public utility buildings, e.g., offices or schools?<sup>63</sup> Between 1995 and 2021, the percentage of the answer »I approve« ranged from 87% in 1995 and 2021 to 91% in 2005 and 2009. Moreover, the studies from 2013 and 2015 showed that crosses at such places were accepted by 98% of regular church-goers, 94% of people representing right-wing views, as well as 64% of those who did not practice religion and 64% of people with leftist views. Mirosława Grabowska notes that »even if something isn't disturbing, it doesn't have to be considered normal or desired«<sup>64</sup>, and writes that in 2013 nearly 90% of the respondents did not mind crosses in public utility buildings but »only« 62% thought that crosses should hang in classrooms, and 56% that they should be placed in the parliamentary hall. Other types of small crosses – those put along public roads – also have more supporters than opponents. In a representative poll conducted in 2018 by the author of this contribution, almost three-quarters of the respondents (rather) approved of the practice of erecting a roadside cross at the place of a fatal accident, and only 11% did not or rather did not<sup>65</sup>. From the list of arguments »why don't you believe and rather don't believe such crosses are appropriate« the option that »they disturb the view, they belong in a cemetery« was chosen by 40% of opponents, followed by the option that »they distract the drivers« (35%). For the people in favour of the crosses, they are a strong warning signal for drivers (52%) and they reflect the Christian faith (48%).

Contrary to the above mentioned small crosses hanging on walls or placed along public roads, traditional medium-sized crosses seem to be fully accepted. This observation has been indirectly confirmed in scientific chapters on traditional roadside crosses and shrines<sup>66</sup>. One may get the impression that folklorists and other scholars praise the uniqueness of roadside crosses in the Polish cultural landscape, ascribing them the roles of »social, cultural and religious

63 Mirosława GRABOWSKA, Postawy wobec obecności religii i Kościoła w przestrzeni publicznej, in: Komunikat z badań nr 3 (2022), pp. 1–12, at p. 7, published by Fundacja Centrum Badań Opinii Publicznej, URL: <[https://www.cbos.pl/SPISKOM.POL/2022/K\\_003\\_22.PDF](https://www.cbos.pl/SPISKOM.POL/2022/K_003_22.PDF)> (06-12-2023).

64 Ibid., p. 11.

65 Lucyna PRZYBYLSKA, Krzyże powypadkowe przy drogach w Polsce, Pelplin 2022, pp. 1–250, at p. 195.

66 SEWERYN, Kapliczki i krzyże przydrożne w Polsce, pp. 1–213; JANICKA-KRZYWDA, Kapliczki i krzyże przydrożne polskiego Podkarpacia, pp. 1–77; MIKOŁAJCZUK/ZAKROCZYMSKA, Gdyńskie kapliczki, figury i krzyże, pp. 1–249.

memory signs«<sup>67</sup>. Roadside crosses are considered to be a grand heritage and a symbol of the »religious, custom-related, integrating, prestigious, aesthetic and cultural needs of local communities«<sup>68</sup>. It must be emphasised that roadside crosses, placed in the fields or woods, at road intersections, and next to churches or private buildings, represent private-family or religious-church memorial initiatives. So far, crosses of this kind have been free from controversies, contrary to the two cases described below, which remained a part of public debate in post-communist Poland for a long time.

The first heated dispute regarded placing several crosses on the gravel pit just outside the former death camp, Auschwitz, in 1998, while the other one was provoked by erecting a cross in front of the Presidential Palace in Warsaw, in 2010. In both situations, it was an attempt to broaden the range of sites where a cross can and should stand. The conflicting opinions prove that there is a limit to the social acceptance of the presence of the cross in public spaces. Geneviève Zubrzycki<sup>69</sup> referred to the people who began to plant small crosses around the large papal cross at Auschwitz as ultranationalists, for whom the crosses were not only symbols of their ethnic-Catholic vision of proper memorialisation but also an attempt to lay claim to what they perceived as a Jewish monopoly on martyrdom. The controversy over the crosses at Auschwitz crystallised latent conflicts regarding the role of Catholicism in defining Polishness<sup>70</sup>.

Geneviève Zubrzycki's conclusion that the Auschwitz crosses controversy had an impact on people's self-understanding as a national community and the development of post-communist Poland's statehood and its changing attitude to Catholicism seems true if we consider the case of another long-lasting dispute over a cross in the public space of Warsaw, over ten years later. Right-wing newspapers interpreted the Cross at the President's Palace as a universal symbol of Poland and the people defending it as true patriots. Left-wing newspapers, however, presented it as merely a pop-cultural sign, just commemorating President Lech Kaczyński, chosen by odd people, mainly Catholics and followers of the right-wing political party »Prawo i Sprawiedliwość« (»Law and Justice«). For the former, the Cross was something to be proud of, for the

67 ADAMOWSKI/WÓJCICKA (eds.), *Krzyże i kapliczki przydrożne jako znaki społecznej, kulturowej i religijnej pamięci*, title page.

68 Kinga CZERWIŃSKA, *Dawne i współczesne role małej architektury sakralnej w społecznościach lokalnych (na przykładzie Śląska Górnego i Cieszyńskiego)*, in: ADAMOWSKI/WÓJCICKA (eds.), *Krzyże i kapliczki przydrożne jako znaki społecznej, kulturowej i religijnej pamięci*, pp. 141–151, at p. 151.

69 Geneviève ZUBRZYCKI, *The Crosses of Auschwitz. Nationalism and Religion in Post-Communist Poland*, Chicago 2009, pp. 1–280, at p. 209.

70 *Ibid.*, p. 168.

latter a reason to feel ashamed<sup>71</sup>. The conflict over the Smolensk Cross highlighted the deep division of the Polish society, which, in very simple terms, can be reduced to a dispute between traditionalism and modernisation<sup>72</sup>. On the one hand, the act of moving the cross was perceived by the defenders of the Cross as dechristianisation of the nation, national betrayal and erasing of the influence of the Church from the Polish and European culture and civilisation. On the other hand, the opponents of the Cross argued that defending the cross as a symbol of the victims of a disaster was blasphemy and that moving the cross was an expression of respect for law and democracy, including the idea of the constitutional separation of church and state. They also claimed that identifying Catholicism with national and political identity was an anachronism.

According to *Przewodnik Katolicki*, the oldest Catholic weekly magazine, Polish Catholics wished to put a symbol of Christ's salvation and suffering in a place like Auschwitz, where millions of people were brutally murdered<sup>73</sup>. Spontaneous memorialisation of the aircraft catastrophe was an expression of faith in the presence of God in those tragic circumstances, as well as a plea for deliverance for the deceased. With time, however, the religious motivation started to give way to anger, violence, spiteful words, and internal divisions within the Church. Crosses started to perform a function other than religious, thus they were desecrated because a holy symbol was used for some people's own secular purposes. Long months of arguments were the »outcome of treating the Cross as a tribal totem«<sup>74</sup>.

Summing up, the agreement and disagreement regarding crosses in public spaces coexist in post-communist Poland. On the one hand, there are forms of crosses that Poles accept more willingly, like traditional roadside crosses, crosses put at the sites of fatal car accidents and crosses hanging on the walls in schools or offices. On the other hand, the controversies over crosses erected in highly symbolic public spaces, like Auschwitz or the Presidential Palace, expose the potentially divisive character of the cross as a public symbol: Both crosses were met with public acceptance and rejection, depending on the perception of the role of statehood and religion. In Poland, there are local

71 Andrzej PAWŁOWSKI, Trzy krzyże nad Parchatką. Symbol w krajobrazie kulturowym Małopolskiego Przełomu Wisły, in: *Prace Komisji Krajobrazu Kulturowego* 15 (2011), pp. 54–63.

72 Przemysław ŻUKIEWICZ / Rafał ZIMNY, Tragedia smoleńska i jej znaczenie dla komunikacji politycznej w Polsce po 10 kwietnia 2010 roku (ze szczególnym uwzględnieniem incydentów politycznych mających miejsce przed Pałacem Prezydenckim), in: *Środkowoeuropejskie Studia Polityczne* 1 (2015), pp. 63–82, at p. 79.

73 Monika BIAŁKOWSKA, Krzyż to nie totem, in: *Przewodnik Katolicki* 37 (2020), URL: <<https://www.przewodnik-katolicki.pl/Archiwum/2020/Przewodnik-Katolicki-37-2020/Temat-numeru/Krzyz-to-nie-totem>> (06-12-2023).

74 *Ibid.*

authorities who perceive the cross as a part of the Polish and Christian tradition of commemoration. As a symbolic form deeply rooted in Polish culture, it is regarded as more appropriate than other objects. An example here is Radzyń Podlaski, already mentioned earlier. Before erecting a cross in memory of the »Baptism of Poland«, a special session of the Town, Powiat and Gmina Council was held, during which »the highest appreciation of all those who for 1050 years have regarded Christ's Cross as the most important signpost in building common good« was accepted by acclamation<sup>75</sup>. In Poland, there are also local authorities who distance themselves from the use of religious symbolism. An example here is Gdańsk, where we find a plaque commemorating the most tragic road accident in Poland. The cross and the plaque put together look like a complete whole, although the description of the monument and the photographs placed on the Roads and Greenery Management Department website (the official carer of the monument) focus exclusively on formal commemoration in the form of the plaque. The cross is only briefly mentioned: »Behind the plaque, there is a wooden cross, ca. 4.5 m tall«<sup>76</sup>.

#### 4. Conclusion

The aim of this chapter was to examine the phenomenon of the proliferation of crosses in postcommunist Poland. The presence of religious people in the society, the democratisation of political life, improvement of the economic situation of the country and local revival of the traditions of a place (so-called *genius loci*) are the driving forces behind the sacralization of public space. Crosses are an indispensable means of this sacralization. Ordinary crosses can be interpreted as a compensation, if not religious retaliation after four decades of official desacralization of public spaces. Finally, Polish society can make up for the »lost time« in spiritual and religious terms. The crosses can also be seen as a response to the ideological emptiness and the hardships of the transformation period following the collapse of the communist regime. Nowadays, the cross expresses patriotic feelings and the building of a postcommunist, Christian-oriented identity. Many parties are involved in the creation of crosses: priests, individual lay people, professional associations, local communities, and local government authorities. The proliferation of crosses also questions the assumptions of secularization theory, according to which the social significance of religion has been declining in modern societies and religion as such has retreated from the public to the private sphere<sup>77</sup>. In Poland,

75 WASAK, Stań! Krzyż Jubileuszowy na skwerze 1050-lecia Chrztu Polski.

76 Pomnik Ofiar Katastrofy Autobusowej w Kokoszkach.

77 DAVIE, *Sociology of Religion*, p. 62.

numerous crosses appear to sacralize the public space, which is understandable only in the light of the dominant role of Catholic religion in the country's history. One could decide to place a flag or a stone monument with a plaque to commemorate an event or a deceased person but these alternatives would not address the deeply-rooted need for a cross in Poland. However, »the historic binding that has held Polish identity and Catholicism together has begun to erode«<sup>78</sup>. Furthermore, in Poland, one could observe a unique form of secularization of religion and religious symbols through their political instrumentalisation and, subsequently, their resacralization as both national and religious symbols. For Genevieve Zubrzycki<sup>79</sup>, the cross is »a *sacred secular* symbol« in Poland. However, it is not only the utility of the cross for sacred and secular purposes that contributes to its ubiquity in the landscape of contemporary Poland. As a symbol, it can be applied both by political and religious institutions from above, as well as by individuals from below for purposes of public commemoration. Thus, it is also the symbol chosen by the people as actors behind Poland's unique form of landscape sacralization.

78 ZUBRZYCKI, *Krzyże oświęcimskie*, p. 166.

79 *Ibid.*, p. 164; ead., *The Crosses of Auschwitz*, p. 220.



### III. POLITICS AND IDEOLOGIES IN EUROPE'S (CULTURE) WARS





Andrea Hofmann

## Between God and the Nation

Sacrificing Life and Sacralizing Death in the First World War



Figure 1: Postcard entitled »Sei getreu bis in den Tod« (approx. 1914);  
Source: Archiv Historische Bildpostkarten, Universität Osnabrück

»Sei getreu bis in den Tod« (»Be faithful unto death«) is the title of a postcard published by the Verlag der Photographischen Gesellschaft Berlin during the First World War<sup>1</sup>. It is a biblical verse from the Revelation of John, which enjoyed great popularity especially in times of war: »Be faithful unto death, and I will give you the crown of life« (Revelation 2:10). The postcard illustration reveals how this verse was interpreted during the First World War. The

<sup>1</sup> Cf. Historische Bildpostkarten, Sammlung Prof. Dr. Sabine Giesbrecht, URL: <<http://nbn-resolving.org/urn:nbn:de:gbv:700-2-0014296-4>> (06-19-2023).

picture shows a dying soldier. The landscape around him is gloomy but from heaven a bright ray of light falls on the dying man. Out of this light, Jesus Christ descends to earth. He lays his hand on the soldier's shoulder, comforting him. The dying man turns his face towards Jesus and seems to die peacefully. He was faithful »unto death«: He fought bravely in the war, sacrificed his life for the fatherland and now receives his eternal reward through Christ.

The postcard is an example of the trivialising portrayal of soldier death in the First World War. It gives the impression that death on the battlefield was an almost idyllic moment. Nothing of the pain and suffering the soldier had to endure is visible. Christ himself hands the soldier »the crown of life« in the face of death, thus rewarding his faithful fight for the fatherland<sup>2</sup>.

The image of soldier death as conveyed on the postcard contrasts with the cruel reality that took place on the battlefields of the First World War. More than any previous conflict, the First World War confronted people at the front and at home with unprecedented violence and mass dying on the battlefields. By the end of the war, there were two million deaths on the German side alone<sup>3</sup>. These circumstances called for interpretations and sense-making. Was the violent death of so many people really necessary and why?

Protestant pastors and Catholic priests from the »German Reich« dealt intensively with these questions. Throughout the war, preaching took place in churches on the home front but also on the battlefields. The pastors and priests tried to make sense of the terrible events. In their sermons, they reflected on the compatibility of Christianity and war, offered assistance in coping with contingency, and often supported the propaganda of the German government. Some theologians also wrote small prayer books that offered incentives for »pious« living during the war and were intended to support and guide people's everyday piety. In these books, Christians could find suggestions for prayer and small meditative texts for different situations during wartime. The cruel death of the soldier was one of the central themes in nearly all of these writings.

In theology and historiography, the question of what role Christian actors have played in wars over the centuries and how wars are at all compatible with the biblical commandment to love one's neighbour and the prohibition of killing has been and continues to be discussed controversially and from

2 Cf. for images of Christ on postcards of the war: Friedrich Erich DOBBERAHN, *Deutsche Theologie im Dienste der Kriegspropaganda. Umdeutung von Bibel, Gesangbuch und Liturgie 1*, Göttingen <sup>2</sup>2023, pp. 95–100.

3 Cf. Klaus LATZEL, *Vom Sterben im Krieg. Wandlungen in der Einstellung zum Soldatentod vom Siebenjährigen Krieg bis zum II. Weltkrieg*, Warendorf 1988, pp. 55–79; Ernst PIPER, *Nacht über Europa. Kulturgeschichte des Ersten Weltkriegs*, Berlin <sup>2</sup>2014, p. 477.

different perspectives<sup>4</sup>. In Germany, however, the history of the First World War was overshadowed for a long time by the history of the Second World War. It was not until 2014, that the First World War was again more strongly perceived as a topic of historical studies by the historically interested public, when the beginning of the war in 1914 was commemorated. In the context of this anniversary, renowned historians wrote important overviews of the history of the war<sup>5</sup>.

In the field of German Church History, the First World War has remained a marginal subject to this day. But here, too, the commemoration of the war in 2014 and 2018 has borne fruit. From a global-historical perspective, Martin Greschat has dealt with central themes of the theology of war in a compact study book<sup>6</sup>. Friedrich Erich Dobberahn focuses in his two-volume work *Deutsche Theologie im Dienste der Kriegspropaganda* on the »reinterpretations« that theologians made of the Bible, hymnal and liturgy during the First World War from the perspective of reception aesthetics<sup>7</sup>. Studies on sermons from the First World War are available by Wilhelm Pressel<sup>8</sup> and Heinrich Missala<sup>9</sup>. An anthology by Matthieu Arnold and Irene Dingel (*Predigt im Ersten Weltkrieg. La prédication durant la »Grande Guerre«*) combines international and interdenominational perspectives on preaching during the First World War<sup>10</sup>.

This chapter relates to the shortly introduced research<sup>11</sup>. It discusses in form of a case study how dying in action was sacralized and thus invested

- 4 Cf. e.g., Friedrich Wilhelm GRAF, Sakralisierung von Kriegen: Begriffs- und problemgeschichtliche Erwägungen, in: Klaus SCHREINER (ed.), Heilige Kriege. Religiöse Begründungen militärischer Gewaltanwendung: Judentum, Christentum und Islam im Vergleich, München 2008, pp. 1–30; Andreas HOLZEM (ed.), Krieg und Christentum. Religiöse Gewalterfahrungen des Westens, Paderborn 2008; Gerd KRUMEICH (ed.), Nation, Religion und Gewalt im 19. und 20. Jahrhundert, Göttingen 2000.
- 5 Cf. e.g., Christopher M. CLARKE, Die Schlafwandler. Wie Europa in den Ersten Weltkrieg zog, München 2013; Jörn LEONHARD, Die Büchse der Pandora. Geschichte des Ersten Weltkriegs, München 2014; Herfried MUENKLER, Der Große Krieg. Die Welt 1914 bis 1918, Berlin 2013.
- 6 Cf. Martin GRESCHAT, Der Erste Weltkrieg und die Christenheit. Ein globaler Überblick, Stuttgart 2015.
- 7 Cf. Friedrich Erich DOBBERAHN, Deutsche Theologie im Dienste der Kriegspropaganda. Umdeutung von Bibel, Gesangbuch und Liturgie 1914–1918, 2 volumes, Göttingen 2023.
- 8 Cf. Wilhelm PRESSEL, Die Kriegspredigt 1914–1918 in der evangelischen Kirche Deutschlands, Göttingen 1967.
- 9 Cf. Heinrich MISSALA, Gott mit uns. Die deutsche katholische Kriegspredigt 1914 bis 1918, München 1968.
- 10 Cf. Matthieu ARNOLD / Irene DINGEL (eds.), Predigt im Ersten Weltkrieg. La prédication durant la »Grande Guerre«, in cooperation with Andrea HOFMANN, Göttingen 2017, URL: <<https://doi.org/10.13109/9783666101533>> (06-12-2023).
- 11 This contribution presents sources and research results of a big monograph, which the author is going to publish in 2024: Andrea HOFMANN, Zwischen Heimatfront und Schlachtfeld. »Kriegsbilder« in protestantischen Predigten und Andachtsschriften des Ersten Weltkriegs, Göttingen 2024 (forthcoming).

with meaning in German Protestant war sermons and devotional texts. The term »sacralization« is understood to mean the »social attribution of sacredness«<sup>12</sup>. It will be shown, through which strategies in sermons and devotional texts the death of the soldier was explained as absolute and inviolable. This was done primarily through the interpretation of certain biblical texts, which were lifted out of their biblical context in sermons and devotional texts. The death of the soldier in action – an actually extra-religious phenomenon – was thereby covered with a sacral interpretation<sup>13</sup>.

By describing dying in action as a »sacrifice«<sup>14</sup> (1.) and relating it to central passages from the Bible, for example Genesis 22 and the Passion of Jesus Christ (2.), sermons and devotional texts declared the »sacrifice« to be of supreme value, while protecting individual life became of secondary importance. In the background of these interpretations were both nationalist and theological considerations: In addition to the special importance that the nation had gained for people's thinking, there was also the theologians' idea that the war was ultimately a milestone on the way to the kingdom of God that Christians were expecting (3.). The esteem that dying in action was held in by virtue of being described as a sacrifice persisted after the end of the war. At that point, in view of the suffering witnessed, pastors like Albert Schweitzer called for the life of the individual to be protected and respected across national boundaries. Schweitzer's sermons showcased a re-sacralization of life after the end of the war (4.).

12 Cf. Johannes Paulmann's contribution in this volume, pp. 293.

13 Cf. for the understanding of sacralization *ibid.*, pp. 297–303; Magnus SCHLETTE / Volkhard KRECH, Sakralisierung, in: Detlef POLLACK et al. (eds.), *Handbuch Religionssoziologie*, Wiesbaden 2018, pp. 437–463, for phenomena areas of sacralization: pp. 445–457.

14 The designation of the soldier's death as a sacrifice seems to have been widespread, with varying accents, since at least the wars of liberation of 1813–1815. Cf. for this topic in a broader perspective: Sonja GOLTERMANN, *Opfer. Die Wahrnehmung von Krieg und Gewalt in der Moderne*, Frankfurt a.M. 2017; Peter BERGHOFF, *Der Tod des politischen Kollektivs. Politische Religion und Sterben und Töten für Volk, Nation und Rasse*, Berlin 1997, esp. pp. 145–152; Angelika DOERFLER-DIERKEN, *Der Tod des Soldaten als Opfer. Protestantische Traditionslinien*, in: Manfred HETTLING / Jörg ECHTERNKAMP (eds.), *Bedingt erinnerungsbereit. Soldatengedenken in der Bundesrepublik*, Göttingen 2008, pp. 75–84; Herfried MUENKLER / Karsten FISCHER, »Nothing to kill or to die for...« – Überlegungen zu einer politischen Theorie des Opfers, in: *Leviathan* 28 (2000), pp. 343–362.

## 1. The death of the soldier in devotional literature – Paul Wurster's *Trostbüchlein*

During the First World War, the short prayer and devotional pamphlets by Paul Wurster, a professor for theology and pastor in Tübingen, were particularly popular and widely read<sup>15</sup>.

Paul Wurster's *Trostbüchlein für die Trauer um die fürs Vaterland Gefallenen*, which went through multiple print-runs during the war, contains short texts on coping with grief for relatives of men who died in the war and relevant Bible quotations, which could be used for the private devotion at home<sup>16</sup>. They were intended to offer comfort to families mourning the loss of a fallen soldier. The *Trostbüchlein* begins with the text »For the fatherland« (»Fürs Vaterland«), which sets the tone for the book:

Fallen in the field! [...] As a good German father, brother, mother or wife, you think: so, this is my part of the great sacrifice! He who has died did not live for nothing. He has made the sacrifice. [...]. For the fatherland! Every single person does his duty; that's the only way it will succeed. [...] It depends on each and every person, but – what counts one person? Given the thousands who have fallen in this year of death, what counts one individual! He was more worth than thousands to you but in the great reckoning for the fatherland he was indeed one among the many. [...] The estates, the parties, the classes were previously so estranged and distant from one another – now a ring of honour is being forged around them by their shared suffering, and they are also bound together by sharing the same sacrifices [...]<sup>17</sup>.

15 Paul Wurster (1860–1923) was professor of Practical Theology and Ethics in Tübingen from 1907. He also provided the preaching service at the *Stiftskirche*. Wurster was involved in the Inner Mission and after the war, he was a member of the *Deutschnationale Volkspartei* (DNVP). Cf. Hermann EHMER, Art. Wurster, Paul, in: Biographisch-Bibliographisches Kirchenlexikon, Bd. 21, Nordhausen 2013, pp. 1569–1572. During the First World War he published a lot of sermons and devotional literature. Cf. for example: Paul WURSTER (ed.), *Kriegspredigten aus dem Großen Krieg 1914 und 1915 von verschiedenen Verfassern*, Stuttgart 1915; id., *Kriegsbetbüchlein für Haus und Familie*. Von Professor D. Wurster, Stuttgart 1914; id., *Kriegsbetbüchlein für Soldaten im Feld* von Professor D. Wurster, Stuttgart 1914.

16 Cf. Paul WURSTER, *Trostbüchlein für die Trauer um die fürs Vaterland Gefallenen*, Stuttgart 1918.

17 WURSTER, *Trostbüchlein*, pp. 3–5: »Gefallen im Feld! [...] Du denkst als braver deutscher Vater, Bruder, als deutsche Mutter oder Gattin: das ist also mein Anteil an dem großen Opfer! Der Gestorbene hat nicht umsonst gelebt. Er hat das Opfer schon gebracht. [...] Fürs Vaterland! Jeder einzelne tut seine Schuldigkeit; so allein gelingt's. [...] Auf jeden kommt es an, und doch – was ist einer? Wo Tausende fallen in diesem Sterbejahr, was ist da der einzelne! Er ist dir mehr gewesen als Tausende, aber in der großen Rechnung für das Vaterland ist er eben einer wie viele. [...] Die Stände, die Parteien, die Klassen, vorher einander so fremd und fern – jetzt werden sie durch den ehernen Ring der gemeinsamen Not zusammengeschmiedet, verbunden auch durch die gemeinsamen Opfer [...]«, my translation.

In this text, Wurster placed the focus on the fate of the individual soldier who had been killed in the war and the suffering and loss of his family. At the same time, however, he stressed that the fallen soldier was just one of many who had had to give their lives in the struggle for the fatherland. According to Wurster, protecting the fatherland was the primary duty of each soldier.

This might require him to sacrifice his own life. The loved ones of the soldiers were also making a sacrifice for the fatherland by letting their male relatives go to war and, thus, accepting their death. The large number of deaths caused by the war connected all parties, estates and classes of the German empire. In his prayer, Wurster understands the »fatherland« as a collective: the term includes all men, women and children living in the German Reich. Wurster suggests the unity and solidarity, with which the »fatherland« stands up for common goals in war.

There were two clear aspects to Wurster's understanding of the soldier's death. First, he underlined the great respect for dying in action, which outweighed the value of the individual life. Second, he pointed out the idea that the fatherland as a collective must be protected, which might make sacrifices necessary. The soldier's death thus took on a significance beyond all measure: by helping to save the fatherland, death was also declared as sacred. Thus, Wurster not only wanted to help the family cope better with the death of their loved one, because even the cruellest death on the battlefield also had meaning in his interpretation. Rather, he also made people aware that the sacrifice of one's own life was necessary to save the nation from ruin.

## 2. The death of the soldier in war sermons – interpretation of central Bible passages

This fundamental interpretation of dying in action, which I just illustrated taking the example of Paul Wurster's short text, can be found in numerous published sermons from the period of the First World War. Two examples illustrate how the frequently-used term »sacrifice« was invested with meaning by theologians and thus sacralized.

On the feast of Harvest Thanksgiving (*Erntedankfest*) in October 1914, the protestant pastor August Kopp of the Palatinate region<sup>18</sup> preached a sermon,

18 August Kopp (1886–1970) worked in the parish of Erlenbach near Kandel, Jettenbach and Rathskirchen from 1912–1915, was vicar in Lauterecken in 1915 and field chaplain from 1915–1918. After the war he joined the *Sozialdemokratische Partei Deutschlands* (SPD). Cf. Georg BIUNDO, *Die evangelischen Geistlichen der Pfalz seit der Reformation* (Pfälzisches Pfarrerbuch), Neustadt a. d. A. 1968, p. 247. In the *Zentralarchiv der Evangelischen Kirche der Pfalz* (Speyer) there is a collection of his handwritten sermons from the time of the First World War. Cf. August KOPP, *Predigtsammlung 1912–1915*,

which is my first example. The sermon deals with the so-called sacrifice of Isaac in Genesis 22<sup>19</sup>. The biblical narrative describes Abraham having to prove his obedience to God by sacrificing his son Isaac. At the last moment, God intervened and provided Abraham with a sacrificial animal, which Abraham sacrificed instead of his son.

Kopp compared Abraham's »sacrifice« with the sacrifices families from his own congregation had had to make during the First World War: »Are we not all in the same situation, having like old grey Abraham to sacrifice that which is dearest to us. We are sacrificing the strength of our nation on the altar of the fatherland«<sup>20</sup>. Kopp drew a parallel between the families who had to let their male relatives go to war and thus to their possible deaths, and Abraham, who was prepared to make a sacrifice of his son to God. Those making the sacrifice – Abraham and the German families – acted because they were obedient towards God and they also trusted that their sacrifice would not be in vain. Kopp linked these thoughts with the promise that Abraham later received from God in Genesis 22:15–19: »[...] What if that promise to Abraham were to ultimately apply to us, too? ›I will multiply you like the stars in heaven and your seed shall possess the gates of your enemies!‹ ›I will make of you a great people!«<sup>21</sup> God had promised Abraham many descendants, which had also come to pass. From this Kopp concluded that the sacrifices made in the war would not be in vain either but would serve a higher goal: the preservation and glory of the fatherland. By linking God's address to Abraham, which already alluded to God's future history of salvation with his people Israel, with the fate of the Germans, Kopp indirectly explained that God also had great things in store for the German people. He invested the death of the soldier with a

in: Archiv der Protestantischen Landeskirche der Pfalz. Abt. 150.024, Nr. 1; id., Predigtsammlung 1916–1919, in: Archiv der Protestantischen Landeskirche der Pfalz, Abt. 150.024, Nr. 2.

19 Cf. August KOPP, Predigtsammlung 1912–1915, Zentralarchiv der Evangelischen Kirche der Pfalz, Abt. 150.024, Nr. 1 (without page numbers). Cf. Andrea HOFMANN, »Jesus im Schützengraben«. Kriegspredigten in Nachlässen pfälzischer und hessischer Pfarrer, in: ARNOLD/DINGEL, Predigt im Ersten Weltkrieg, pp. 31–44, at pp. 33–38, URL: <<https://doi.org/10.13109/9783666101533.31>> (06-12-2023).

20 KOPP, Predigtsammlung 1912–1915, Zentralarchiv der Evangelischen Kirche der Pfalz, Abt. 150.024, Nr. 1 (without page numbers): »Sind wir nicht alle in der gleichen Lage, daß wir wie der Alte graue Abraham das hergeben müssen was uns am nächsten steht. Wir opfern die Stärke unseres Volkes auf dem Altar des Vaterlandes.«, my translation. Cf. for the motif »sacrifice on the altar of the fatherland«: Sabine BEHRENBECK, Heldenkult und Opfermythos. Mechanismen der Kriegsbegeisterung 1918–1945, in: Marcel van der LINDEN/Gottfried MERGNER (eds.), Kriegsbegeisterung und mentale Kriegsvorbereitung. Interdisziplinäre Studien, Berlin 1991, pp. 143–159, at p. 147.

21 »[...] Wenn da am Ende auch uns jene Verheißung des Abraham gelten würde? ›Ich will dich mehren wie die Sterne am Himmel und dein Same soll besitzen die Tore deiner Feinde!‹ ›Ich will dich zum großen Volke machen!«., my translation.

special significance in view of the biblical example. He also connected his death on the battlefield with the will of God, and in doing so attributed such a high value to it, that dying in action could in his view be considered sacred.

A second example is a sermon by Franz Rohde, a pastor from Karlsruhe<sup>22</sup>, on the Passion of Christ. In Passiontide 1915, he gave a sermon on the biblical statement »It is finished« (John 19:30), which Jesus exclaimed on the cross directly before his death, according to the Gospel of St John<sup>23</sup>. Similar to August Kopp, Rohde drew in his sermon a connection between the biblical narrative and the war effort. He praised in particular the young German heroes who had gone to war:

Those who lose their young lives as heroes have sowed a richer seed in the souls of the survivors than those who live a long life and bring home the harvest of life and, finally, than those who, burdened with shame and disgrace, die a living death over the years: They are the greatest of all, who out-shine the other heroes through the blessing that they impart<sup>24</sup>.

In Rohde's view, the death of a young man in war who had his whole life ahead of him was especially heroic because it was a deliberate sacrifice made for others – those not fighting and surviving at the home front. In this, it differed from the death of a person in old age. Rohde also emphasized that the greatest heroes are those who had had to suffer shame and insult in the face of death. Here he had Jesus himself in mind who, according to biblical accounts, had been insulted and ridiculed before his death. Consequently, Rohde understood Jesus' suffering and death, which had led to the redemption of mankind, as an example for each individual soldier, and even for the whole German nation:

22 Franz Rohde was a pastor in Karlsruhe from 1898–1932. Cf. Gerhard SCHWINGE, Art. Rohde, Franz, in: Biographisch-bibliographisches Kirchenlexikon, Bd. 40, Nordhausen 2019, pp. 1088–1094. During the First World War he published some of his sermons: Franz ROHDE, Kriegspredigten. Gehalten in der Christuskirche zu Karlsruhe i. B. am 9., 16., 23. August, 6. u. 13. September 1914, Karlsruhe 1914; id., Deutscher Glaube. Zweite Folge der Kriegspredigten. Gehalten in der Christuskirche zu Karlsruhe i. B. am 27. September, 4. und 25. Oktober, 1., 8. und 22. November 1914, Karlsruhe 1914; id., Kreuz und Krieg. Dritte Folge der Kriegspredigten, Karlsruhe 1914.

23 Cf. Franz ROHDE, Dreierlei Lebensvollendung. Predigt über Johannes 19,30. 28. Februar 1915, in: Id., Kreuz und Krieg. Dritte Folge der Kriegspredigten, Karlsruhe 1915, pp. 33–36.

24 Ibid., p. 36: »Die ihr junges Leben verbluten als Helden, die dürfen eine reichere Saat in die Seelen der Überlebenden ausstreuen als die, die in einem langen Leben die Ernte des Lebens nach Hause brachten, und endlich die, die mit Schande und Schmach beladen durch die Jahre lebend sterben, das sind die allergrößten, die die andern Helden noch mit dem Segen, den sie spenden, überstrahlen«, my translation.



But He [Jesus], who said on the cross »It is finished«, died a twofold death. Crucified alive and ridiculed, he breathed his last as a young hero. [...] And if our nation in its passion can emulate Him in both – remain true to itself, to the best that it has in itself, to the spirit of its fathers, of its heroes, the spirit of our Lord [...] – then the day will come when it shall be said »It is finished, the great resurrection morning is here, the German spirit shines victorious and pure on all countries«<sup>25</sup>.

In Rohde's sermon, Jesus is seen as a young hero who had voluntarily given his life for others. If the Germans – each individual as well as the nation as a whole – demonstrated the same willingness to sacrifice, thereby placing themselves in the ranks of Jesus and the heroes of German history, then the German nation would be blessed. In the Bible, the Passion of Christ leads to the resurrection and thus to Jesus' victory over death. Drawing a parallel to the conclusion of the story of the Passion of Christ, in relation to the present time, Rohde expressed his hopes for the victory of the German character, that is, for the preservation of the German fatherland and of German values and the resurrection of the German nation after the war<sup>26</sup>.

### 3. Ethical dimensions – the German nation and the coming of the kingdom of God

August Kopp and Franz Rohde used the German word *Opfer* to describe the death of the soldier, a term, that can mean both *sacrifice* and *victim*. From the context of their sermons and the usage of the word it was clear that they referred to the sense of the Latin word *sacrificium* – the voluntary giving of something for others<sup>27</sup>. The term »sacrifice« was linked with the biblical texts Genesis 22 and the story of the Passion of Christ in a very deliberate way. In this way, dying in action assumed a special quality. Both Abraham and Jesus had proved their unconditional obedience to God. Not their own will, but the will of God had decided their actions. Additionally, Jesus had given his life

25 ROHDE, Dreierlei Lebensvollendung, pp. 35f.: »Der [Jesus] aber, der am Kreuz sprach: Es ist vollbracht – ist den doppelten Tod gestorben: lebendig gekreuzigt und gehöhnt, hat er sterbend als junger Held sein Leben ausgehaucht. [...] Und wenn unser Volk in seiner Passion ihm beides nachtun kann: sich selber treu bleiben, dem Besten, was es in sich trägt, dem Geiste seiner Väter, seiner Helden, dem Geiste unsres Herrn [...] dann kommt der Tag, wo es heißt: Es ist vollbracht, der große Auferstehungsmorgen ist da, das deutsche Wesen scheint sieghaft und rein in alle Lande«, my translation.

26 Cf. for this interpretation also: BEHRENBECK, Heldenkult und Opfermythos, p. 148; PRESSEL, Kriegspredigt, pp. 160–169, pp. 233–238, pp. 349f., pp. 358f.

27 Cf. DOERFLER-DIERKEN, Der Tod des Soldaten, pp. 75–84; BEHRENBECK, Heldenkult und Opfermythos, pp. 146–148.

in substitution for the redemption of mankind. His death had thus served a higher purpose, just as Abraham's obedience had been the foundation for the emergence of the biblical nation of Israel.

In the background of the sacralization of the soldier's death is the idea of the »holy nation«, which had emerged during the 19th century. The nation, in the German case an »imagined community« also underpinned with religious and denominational meaning was charged and valorized with certain historical images and values and with reference to a common culture (in this case, a »German« culture)<sup>28</sup>. As a secular phenomenon the nation was also shaped by religious motifs and thus elevated into the religious sphere<sup>29</sup>. In church circles, for example, the idea was widespread that the German people were the new Israel, i. e., the new chosen people of God, who were now entitled to a position of primacy in the world over all other nations because of their sacredness. It therefore had to be protected. In case of emergency, this could mean that people had to give their own lives for the preservation of the nation – like soldiers in case of war<sup>30</sup>.

The death of the soldier on the battlefield would – according to the discussed sermons – also lead to the attainment of higher aims, which were connected with central Christianethical questions. These questions were asked by almost all pastors in the time of the First World War. In concise form, they can be found in the small book *Der Krieg im Lichte der christlichen Ethik*<sup>31</sup> by the Leipzig professor of theology Ludwig Ihmels<sup>32</sup>. In this book, Ihmels explained why the First World War was a just war and had to be fought by the Ger-

28 Cf. Frank BECKER, Konfessionelle Nationsbilder im Deutschen Kaiserreich, in: Heinz-Gerhard HAUPT/Dieter LANGEWIESCHE (eds.), *Nation und Religion in der deutschen Geschichte*, Frankfurt et al. 2001, pp. 389–418, at p. 389. He refers to the research of: Benedict ANDERSON, *Die Erfindung der Nation. Zur Karriere eines folgenreichen Konzepts*, Erweiterte Neuauflage, Frankfurt et al. 1996.

29 Cf., e. g., Friedrich Wilhelm GRAF, *Die Nation – von Gott »erfunden«?*, in: Id., *Die Wiederkehr der Götter. Religion in der modernen Kultur*, München <sup>2</sup>2004, pp. 102–132, with reference to war sermons on the First World War: p. 126; BECKER, *Konfessionelle Nationsbilder*, pp. 389–418. Carsten Kretschmann discusses in his articles, how communion was sacralized during First World War, cf. Carsten KRETSCHMANN, »Der Herr sei mit Euch, Ihr braven Krieger«. Sakralisierungsstrategien im Kontext des Ersten Weltkriegs, in: Karl-Joseph HUMMELS/Christoph KOESTERS (eds.), *Kirche, Krieg und Katholiken. Geschichte und Gedächtnis im 20. Jahrhundert*, Freiburg et al. 2014, pp. 50–66, here the meaning of the sacrifice for the communion: pp. 53–65; Carsten KRETSCHMANN, *Burgfrieden und Union Sacrée. Sakralisierungsstrategien im Kontext des Ersten Weltkriegs*, in: *Historisches Jahrbuch 134* (2014), pp. 61–76.

30 Cf. GRAF, *Die Nation*, pp. 125–132.

31 Cf. Ludwig IHMELS, *Der Krieg im Lichte der christlichen Ethik*, Leipzig <sup>2</sup>1915.

32 Ludwig Ihmels (1858–1953) was professor for Systematical Theology in Leipzig since 1902. In 1922 he was elected bishop of the Evangelical Church of Saxony. Cf. Michael TILLY, Art. Ihmels, Ludwig, in: *Biographisch-bibliographisches Kirchenlexikon*, Bd. 2, Nordhausen 1990, p. 1262.

mans – even at the risk of thousands of German soldiers losing their lives. The ideas that Ihmels summarized were widespread in the »German Reich« and can also be seen as background for the presented examples from the devotional writings and sermons.

The war and the sacrifice of life would in Ihmels's opinion result in the preservation of the German fatherland. Ihmels believed – as did many theologians between 1914 and 1918 – that the war was a defensive war imposed on the German people by their wartime adversary<sup>33</sup>. The task of the German government was now to protect the people<sup>34</sup>.

Ihmels also believed that the war would result in a moral renewal in a world that had fallen away from the faith. The German nation should bring about a moral improvement in the world during the war, by violent means if necessary. This moral improvement – Ihmels argued – should prepare the way for the Kingdom of God, which was expected to come at the end of all time<sup>35</sup>.

In these ideas, which were shared by a lot of theologians during the war, nationalist and eschatological ideas were combined<sup>36</sup>. Dying in action, which was sacralized by being interpreted as a »sacrifice« and being related to central passages in the Bible, occupied a key position in this interpretation. Only through the sacrifices of the individual could the nation as a collective be preserved and thus also ultimately the coming of the Kingdom of God be advanced. But as long as the kingdom of God was not yet completed, sacrifices were still necessary and the nation also had to continue to exist. Only at the end of all times could the nation be absorbed into the one Kingdom of

33 From today's perspective, the question of who was to blame for the beginning of the war cannot be answered so clearly. The assassination of the Austrian Crown Prince Franz Ferdinand and his wife Sophie on 28 June 1914 was the climax of a long-running conflict between the Balkan countries and Austria-Hungary. Since the 1880s, all the major European powers had also been arming their fleets and armies and forming defensive alliances in the event of war. For an example of a modern interpretation of the events in the summer of 1914, cf. CLARKE, *Die Schlafwandler*, pp. 169–471.

34 Cf. IHMELS, *Der Krieg*, pp. 9–17. Cf. Andrea HOFMANN, »Kämpfet recht!« Themen einer evangelischen »Soldatenethik« im Deutschen Reich während des Ersten Weltkriegs, in: *Interdisciplinary Journal for Religion and Transformation in Contemporary Society (J-Rat) 4/1 | Moralities of Warfare and Religion (2018)*, pp. 88–105, URL: <<https://doi.org/10.14220/jrat.2018.4.1.88>> (06-12-2023). Cf. also id., Überlegungen zur Ausbildung einer »Zwei-Reiche-Lehre« in wissenschaftlichen Schriften und Predigten des Ersten Weltkriegs, in: Jürgen KAMPFMAN/Hans OTTE (eds.), *Angewandtes Lutherum? Die Zwei-Reiche-Lehre als theologische Konstruktion in politischen Kontexten des 20. Jahrhunderts*, Gütersloh 2017, pp. 53–65.

35 Cf. IHMELS, *Der Krieg*, pp. 9–17.

36 The understanding of the Kingdom of God outlined here goes back to Albrecht Ritschl (1822–1899), one of the most prominent theologians of the 19th century. Cf. Albrecht RITSCHL, *Unterricht in der Christlichen Religion: Studienausgabe nach der 1. Auflage von 1875 nebst den Abweichungen der 2. und 3. Auflage*, ed. by Christine AXTPISCALAR, Tübingen 2002.

God<sup>37</sup>. These ideas went hand in hand with a desacralization of the life of the individual person. The continued existence of the collective, the fatherland, was important, not the life of the individual<sup>38</sup>.

#### 4. After the end of the war – Albert Schweitzer

After the end of the war, some theologians called into question the nationalist idea of German omnipotence and the idea that the German nation was especially chosen by God. In German Protestant theology, positions developed which, in retrospect, judged the war much more critically than had been customary before 1918<sup>39</sup>.

One example is a sermon of the Alsatian theologian and physician Albert Schweitzer (1875–1965). In order to be able to better classify Albert Schweitzer's sermon, a few remarks on his biography should precede. Schweitzer was born in 1875 in Kaysersberg in Alsace. Before the war he had worked as a theologian in Strasbourg, where he also had studied medicine. At the beginning of the First World War, he was already working in the mission station in Lambaréné in Africa. In 1917 he and his wife Helene were arrested in Africa and interned in France until July 1918. In the fall of 1918, both returned to Strasbourg, where Schweitzer had been employed as a vicar at the Church of St. Nicolas before the war<sup>40</sup>.

Alsace was marked by changes of nationality in its history. In 1871, after the Franco-Prussian War, it was annexed to the »German Reich«. During the First World War, however, the Alsatian population did not position itself unitedly behind the »German Reich«: rather, there were numerous people, including pastors, who felt a much stronger affiliation to France than to the »German Reich«. After the German defeat in 1918, Alsace was to be returned to France. Inhabitants who were not native to Alsace or France, but from the »German Reich«, had to leave Alsace very quickly<sup>41</sup>. The difference between French, German, and native-born Alsatian inhabitants intensified once again in the

37 Cf. IHMELS, *Der Krieg*, pp. 9–17.

38 Cf. also PRESSEL, *Kriegspredigt*, pp. 15–29, pp. 177–188, pp. 205–210.

39 Cf. for a short overview about German protestant theology during the 1920s: Johannes WALLMANN, *Kirchengeschichte Deutschlands seit der Reformation*, Tübingen 2012, pp. 258–261.

40 Cf. Matthieu ARNOLD, *Albert Schweitzer. Seine Jahre im Elsass (1875–1913)*, Leipzig 2019.

41 Cf. Jean-Noël GRANDHOMME / Francis GRANDHOMME, *Les Alsaciens-Lorrains dans la Grande Guerre*, Straßburg 2013, pp. 410–419; Mareike KOENIG / Élise JULIEN, *Verfeindung und Verflechtung. Deutschland und Frankreich 1870–1918*, Darmstadt 2019, pp. 254f.; Marc LIENHARD, *Histoire & aléas de l'identité alsacienne*, Straßburg 2011, pp. 30–32, pp. 45–62.

postwar period. Schweitzer's family exemplifies that even entire families could be divided: While Schweitzer's father Louis was able to remain in Gunsbach in the *Vallée de Munster* as a »true« Alsatian, Schweitzer's parents-in-law, the history professor Harry Breslau and his wife Caroline, were forced to leave Alsace as »Germans«<sup>42</sup>. Because of this special family situation and also because of his experiences in Africa<sup>43</sup>, Albert Schweitzer's sermons are largely free of nationalistic slogans. Instead, Schweitzer tried to show perspectives for a new coexistence of nations in the European context. In his sermon on Sunday of the Dead in 1918, he pleaded for a new respect for life, not for death. According to Schweitzer, the common grief felt by all nations for those they had lost (their »sacrifices«) was the ideal condition for reconciliation between the nations, between the victors and the defeated<sup>44</sup>:

42 Cf. Matthieu ARNOLD, *Albert Schweitzer. Seine Jahre im Elsass (1875–1913)*, Leipzig 2019, pp. 315–319; Thomas SUERMANN, *Albert Schweitzer als »homo politicus«*. Eine biographische Studie zum politischen Denken und Handeln des Friedensnobelpreisträgers, Berlin 2017, pp. 53–60, pp. 128–146.

43 In his *Selbstzeugnissen*, Albert Schweitzer recalls in detail the reactions that the First World War provoked in his mission station. He reported, among other things, from the year 1914: »Dass viele Eingeborene die Frage in sich bewegen, wie es möglich sei, dass die Weißen, die ihnen das Evangelium der Liebe bringen, sich jetzt gegenseitig morden und sich damit über die Gebote des Herrn Jesu hinwegsetzen, fühlen wir alle. Wenn sie uns die Frage stellen, sind wir hilflos. [...] Wie viel die ethische und religiöse Autorität der Weißen bei den Naturkindern durch diesen Krieg leidet, wird man erst später ermessen können. Ich fürchte, dass der Schaden gewaltig sein wird.« (»That many natives move the question within themselves, how it is possible that the whites, who bring them the gospel of love, now murder each other and thus disregard the commandments of the Lord Jesus, we all feel. When they ask us the question, we are helpless. [...] How much the ethical and religious authority of the white man suffers among the children of nature as a result of this war can only be judged later. I fear that the damage will be enormous«, my translation). Schweitzer here also raised the question of the compatibility of Christianity and war. While other Protestant pastors saw this compatibility in 1914, Schweitzer was more critical. For him, a gospel that preached love and a violent war did not seem to fit together. Cf. ALBERT SCHWEITZER, *Selbstzeugnisse. Aus meiner Kindheit und Jugendzeit. Zwischen Wasser und Urwald. Briefe aus Lambarene*, München <sup>8</sup>1988, pp. 177–191, at p. 179. Cf. SUERMANN, *Albert Schweitzer*, pp. 135–141.

44 Cf. on this important sermon by Schweitzer, especially the research of Matthieu Arnold: Matthieu ARNOLD, *Deux façons de prêcher au lendemain de l'armistice (23 et 26 Novembre 1918)*. Charles-Théodore Gérold et Albert Schweitzer, in: *Cahiers Albert Schweitzer 176* (December 2019), pp. 48–59; id., *Precher durant la Première Guerre Mondiale: Barth et Schweitzer face à une théologie belliqueuse*, in: *Foi et vie* 102/3 (2003), pp. 41–62; id., *Aspekte der Predigt bei zwei Straßburger Theologen*, in: DINGEL/ARNOLD (ed.), *Predigt im großen Krieg*, pp. 125–141, at pp. 129–139, URL: <<https://doi.org/10.13109/9783666101533.125>> (06-12-2023); id., *Albert Schweitzer et l'éthique du respect de la vie*, Straßburg 2018; SUERMANN, *Albert Schweitzer*, pp. 135–146.

They [the soldiers] in all countries went to war, each to protect his nation from the horrors of war and to protect its freedom. [...] External circumstances determined that for some their death sealed victory while for others it was without success. But that is not all that is to be said about the meaning of their deaths. Now that we can look back on the war as something that is over, we see those who were sacrificed as a multitude in which there are no longer any differences of race or nation. We see them as people united in suffering and pain, demanding something of us. [...] Respect for human suffering and human life, even for the lowliest and most unassuming, is the castiron law that should henceforth rule the world<sup>45</sup>.

In his sermon, Schweitzer described the deaths of soldiers as a »sacrifice«, similar to many theologians during the First World War: The sacralization of dying in action was thus retained in Schweitzer's interpretation. However, while Paul Wurster's *Trostbüchlein* stated that the sacrifices guaranteed cohesion within the nation, Schweitzer drew a wider arc. For him, too, the sacrifices served a higher purpose: The soldiers of all the nations involved in the war had been prepared to sacrifice their lives for the survival of their nation. At the end of the war, what mattered to Schweitzer was no longer which nation had triumphed over the other. Rather, he emphasized what had united the nations that had participated in the war: From the shared experience of suffering a new togetherness was to emerge as well as the insight that the esteem of the individual life had to come first, not the nation. It should bring the reconciliation of the opposing nations of the war across national divides. Schweitzer's sermon thus reveals a resacralization of life, which in his view must be considered the highest good to be protected<sup>46</sup>.

45 Albert SCHWEITZER, Morgenpredigt Sonntag 24. November 1918, St. Nicolai. Zum Gedächtnis unserer Toten Apk 21,4, in: Id., Predigten 1898–1948, ed. by Richard BRUELLMANN / Erich GRAESSER, München 2001, pp. 1208–1212, at pp. 1209f.: »[...] Sie [die Soldaten] haben sich dahingegeben in allen Ländern, um jeder sein Volk vor den Greueln des Krieges zu bewahren und ihm die Freiheit zu erhalten. [...] Äußere Umstände entschieden bei den einen, daß der Tod den Sieg besiegelte, bei den anderen, daß er ohne Erfolg war. Aber das ist nicht das letzte an der Bedeutung ihres Todes. Jetzt, wo wir auf den Krieg als etwas Vollendetes zurückblicken, stehen die, die geopfert wurden, als eine Schar, in der es keine Unterschiede von Rasse und Nation mehr gibt, als Menschen, die in Leid und Schmerz geeint sind, vor uns und fordern etwas von uns. [...] Ehrfurcht vor Menschenleid und Menschenleben, vor dem kleinsten und unscheinbarsten, sei das ehernen Gesetz, das hinfort die Welt regiere. [...]«, my translation.

46 Schweitzer made a similar consideration with regard to his work in the mission: In his *Selbstzeugnisse* he emphasized that »[d]ie, die an sich erfuhren, was Angst und körperliches Weh sind, [...] in der ganzen Welt zusammen [gehören]« (»[T]hose who experienced in themselves what fear and physical pain are [...] belong together in the whole world«, my translation). But precisely these people would then have the duty, on the

## 5. Conclusion

The soldier who had fought loyally to his fatherland until his death had not died in vain, but was comforted by Christ himself – this is suggested by the postcard presented at the beginning of this chapter. The facts of war speak against this idyllic idea. The gruesome death of the soldiers demanded a meaningful interpretation. On the basis of the source examples analyzed above, strategies can be identified, through which the death of the soldier was explained in the context of Protestant theology as inviolable, giving meaning and norm. The central media that pastors used for this purpose and through which they could reach a large number of people during the First World War were printed sermons and small devotional texts. These writings were widely distributed in households during the war, as well as among soldiers, and thus were an important part of Protestant piety during the war. They offered interpretations, spiritual guidance and meaning, to help the people cope with the incomprehensible suffering and losses. By describing dying in action as a sacrifice, the theological texts linked the deaths of soldiers implicitly – or even explicitly – with biblical narratives such as the sacrifice of Isaac and the death of Jesus on the cross. This strategy consisted primarily in transferring biblical motifs to the present. In this way, dying in action, which was actually a non-religious phenomenon often of almost incomparable horror, was moved towards the sacred sphere<sup>47</sup>. It now appeared as comparable with the suffering and death of Jesus Christ and, like the death of Jesus, it served a higher purpose. Jesus Christ's death had redeemed mankind and the death of the soldier was supposed to result in the redemption of the fatherland, a collective that was valued more highly than the life of the individual. It also represented a step towards establishing the pre-eminence of the German nation in the world, which was portrayed as part of the process of the coming of the Kingdom of God. The pastors also communicated their certainty that the soldier could be assured of the support of God at the moment of death, and of his own salvation.

The sacralization of the soldier's death was pursued, on the one hand, to give theological meaning to the cruel dying on the battlefield. In this way, the pastors wanted to offer comfort to the mourners but also to the soldiers who had to put themselves in danger: The death of the soldiers now appeared to be particularly valuable and, moreover, also seemed to correspond to God's will. On the other hand, the death of soldiers was also sacralized in order to ensure the preservation of the German nation: it was seen as absolutely worthy of

basis of their experiences, to help other sick people and thus help them to recover as well. Here, too, the motifs of the appreciation of life and the unifying power of suffering appear. Cf. SCHWEITZER, *Selbstzeugnisse*, pp. 207–209, at p. 207.

<sup>47</sup> Cf. SCHLETTE / KRECH, *Sakralisierung*, pp. 445–459.

protection and, in the eyes of many, was massively threatened during the war. Only by the soldiers sacrificing their lives for the nation could the nation be saved. However, the preservation of the nation was considered more valuable than the life of the individual. Thus, while the nation and the death of the soldier were sacralized for the nation, the life of the individual was desacralized.

The sacralization of the soldier's death happened not only through sermons and devotional writings, as stated above. Another sacralization strategy was the erection of monuments and war graves, which were often also equipped with crosses and thus also glorified the soldier's death and brought it close to Jesus' death on the cross. Through these monuments, the sacralization of the soldier's death became visible – and at the same time, a monument was also set here to the nation, which was to be kept alive through the death of many people<sup>48</sup>.

After the end of the First World War and the German defeat in 1918, all these patterns of interpretation, which had always assumed a German victory, lost their plausibility. New theological interpretations for dying on the battlefield and its meaning had to be found. One example therefore were the sermons of Albert Schweitzer<sup>49</sup>.

In Albert Schweitzer's sermon after the end of the war, the death of the soldier was also viewed as being of supreme value. Schweitzer retained the description of dying in action as a »sacrifice«, as well as the idea that dying in action served a higher purpose. But for Schweitzer – from his after-war perspective – this higher purpose was reconciliation between the nations in view of the suffering experienced on all sides, and not the preservation of individual nations and their striving for dominance. Apart from this viewpoint, what was new in Schweitzer's sermon was the re-sacralization of the individual human life, which was portrayed as being particularly worthy of protection and preservation. »Respect for human suffering and human life, even for the lowliest and most unassuming, is the cast-iron law that should henceforth rule the world«<sup>50</sup>.

48 Cf. the essays in: Manfred HETTLING / Jörg ECHTERNKAMP (eds.), *Gefallenengedenken im globalen Vergleich. Nationale Tradition, politische Legitimation und Individualisierung der Erinnerung*, München 2013; LEONHARD, *Die Büchse der Pandora*, pp. 979–996; John WOLFFE, *Forever England beneath the Cross of Sacrifice. Christianity and National Identity in British First World War Cemeteries*, in: John Carter WOOD (ed.), *Christianity and National Identity in Twentieth-Century Europe. Conflict, Community, and the Social Order*, Göttingen 2006, pp. 53–72, URL: <<https://doi.org/10.13109/9783666101496.53>> (06-12-2023).

49 Cf. for the development of theology and churches in the Weimar Republic concisely: Christoph STROHM, *Die Kirchen im Dritten Reich*, München 2011, pp. 10–16; Hans-Walter KRUMWIEDE, *Evangelische Kirche und Theologie in der Weimarer Republik*, Neukirchen-Vluyn 1990. Here, the different directions that theology took during this time become just as clear as breaks and continuities with the theology of the Third Reich.

50 SCHWEITZER, *Morgenpredigt*, p. 1210.



Gregor Feindt

## Making the »new man«

Baťa, Batism and the Ideologies of Social Engineering  
in Interwar Czechoslovakia\*

Across the twentieth century, »new men« populated the world. Yet the »new industrial man« of Zlín was a particular kind. In this Czechoslovak company town, the Baťa shoe company spent the first half of the 20th century engineering a rational, healthy and committed male employee who would advance the company's global trade in cheap mass-produced shoes and at the same time advance his individual life. After the First World War, the company had embraced Taylorism and Fordist methods of industrial organisation to become the biggest company in Czechoslovakia's consumer goods industry. Apart from building further factories across the country and in neighbouring Central European states, Baťa also expanded into 20 countries and colonial territories in Africa, Asia and the Americas. By 1938, Baťa employed more than 29,000 workers and clerks in its Zlín factories alone, accounting for an impressive 43.2 % of Czechoslovakia's exports<sup>1</sup>. At the core of this success was the »more efficient and independent human being«. Indeed, the company portrayed this »new industrial man«<sup>2</sup> as at least as important a product as the shoes. In company newspapers, at mass festivals and in the dormitories of Zlín's prestigious Baťa School of Work, the company's ideal male employee was modelled after the example of company founder Tomáš Baťa and embodied the company's ideology. This new man was implemented as a meaningful ideal long before the company began to use the semantics of a »new industrial man«<sup>3</sup>.

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1 Internal statistics, 1938, Státní okresní archiv [SokA] Zlín, Baťa II/2, kart. 1040, i. č. 42, p. 11; Zachary Austin DOLESHAL, *In the Kingdom of Shoes. Bata, Zlín, Globalization, 1894–1945*, Toronto 2022, p. 7. Antonín CEKOTA, Zlín. Die Stadt der Mitarbeit, Zlín 1936, p. 38.

2 Ibid.; *Výběr a výchova průmyslového člověka*, 1938, SokA Zlín, Baťa II/1, i. č. 17, p. 21.

3 In Czech, but also in other languages relevant for this chapter's undertaking, i. e. German, Russian and Italian, the »new men« was gender-neutral (*nový člověk*, *neuer*

Baťa imagined the ideal employee and new man as a »pioneer of labour« capable of working at any of the global satellite companies and aimed to extend this model beyond the shoe company<sup>4</sup>. Unlike his Soviet or Fascist counterparts, the Baťa man or *Batovec* (plural *Batovci*) was not the brainchild of an outspoken political ideology but rather the champion of an implicit ideologisation of industrial rationalisation and the teleological concept of progress<sup>5</sup>. Hence, the concept of the *Batovec* appealed to totalitarian regimes, for instance when during the German occupation of the Czech lands, Nazi authorities organised training programmes for German workers at Baťa. The programme aimed to make use of the company's industrial organisation of production for the German economy and to imitate the exemplary degree of ideological commitment. The programme even received the short-term endorsement of Adolf Hitler and was a rare example of Czech-German transfer of knowledge in the context of occupation<sup>6</sup>. A few years later, Czechoslovak Communists began making extensive use of Baťa's industrial organisation. They took up the company's methods of social engineering at least to some extent, despite their ardent criticism of Baťa and Batism in the interwar period. Being developed in an industrial and depoliticised context, Baťa's methods of optimising its employees were appropriated easily, albeit with an ideological twist.

*Mensch, novýj chelovek and nouvo uomo*). While Fritzsche and Hellbeck argue that the more perfect human being was rendered part of a collective and therefore also in practice gender-neutral, this chapter maintains that the dominant prototype was imagined masculine, which makes new men the adequate translation in most contexts. Peter FRITZSCHE / Jochen HELLBECK, *The New Man in Stalinist Russia and Nazi Germany*, in: Michael GEYER / Sheila FITZPATRICK (eds.), *Beyond Totalitarianism. Stalinism and Nazism Compared*, Cambridge 2009, pp. 302–341, at pp. 305f. See also Jakub MACHEK, *Nový člověk v českých meziválečných utopích*, in: Lukáš FASORA et al. (eds.), *Svůdnost sociálního experimentu. Nový člověk 20. století*, Prague 2018, pp. 109–121, at pp. 115f. For a gender analysis of the new man and woman, see also: Denisa NEČASOVÁ, »Eine Mutter-Bergarbeiterin zählt mehr als ein Bergarbeiter«. *Das Bild der »neuen sozialistischen Frau« in der stalinistischen Tschechoslowakei*, in: *Bohemia* 53 (2013), pp. 339–378; Ead., *Nový socialistický člověk. Československo 1948–1956*, Brno 2018.

- 4 Martin MAREK / Vit STROBACH, »Batismus, urychlená modernita a průkopníci práce«. *Personální politika Baťova*, in: *Moderní dějiny* 18 (2010), pp. 103–153, at p. 105.
- 5 Cf. David Franklin NOBLE, *Forces of Production. A Social History of Industrial Automation*, New York 1984; Rüdiger HACHTMANN, *Industriearbeiterschaft und Rationalisierung 1900 bis 1945. Bemerkungen zum Forschungsstand*, in: *Jahrbuch für Wirtschaftsgeschichte* 1 (1996), pp. 211–258; Lindy BIGGS, *The Rational Factory. Architecture, Technology, and Work in America's Age of Mass Production*, Baltimore, Md. 1996.
- 6 Deutsches Staatsministerium für Böhmen und Mähren to Heinrich Himmler, 18.12.1943, Národní Archiv [NA] Prague, Německé státní ministerstvo pro Čechy a Moravu, Praha, inv. č. 1080, sig. 110–11/18, kart. 88, p. 20.

Starting in the 1920s, contemporaries linked the practices of industrial organisation and social engineering in Zlín with totalitarian ideologies and with some regarding it even as a form of political religion. Especially critics of the company's capitalist organisation and the often-harsh working conditions brought forward this comparison. Soviet writer Ilya Ehrenburg, for instance, accused company founder Tomáš Baťa of silencing critical journalists at home and abroad, describing him as »truly, a Mussolini of boots«<sup>7</sup>. Yet, the company itself made use of such a comparison to centralised developmentalist states to stress its dynamic and innovative methods. In a reply to Ehrenburg's pamphlet, the company claimed to have installed a work programme in 1922 »that a few years later« would have been »called a five-year plan in [Soviet] Russia«<sup>8</sup>. Affirmative comparisons even with violent and authoritarian political regimes were an accepted tool of communication.

The company also employed the language of traditional religion, captioning internal handbooks as »catechisms« and formulating guidelines for the personnel department as »Decalogues« to enhance their status<sup>9</sup>. In a society that in 1918 had torn down religious monuments in an attempt to symbolically break with Habsburg rule, the Roman Catholic Church had dramatically lost significance and religious metaphors could be employed easily<sup>10</sup>. However, the usage of religious metaphors in these handbooks reveals the sense of gravity and fundamental importance that decision-makers in Zlín displayed in their action. The Catechism was nothing more than an umbrella term for detailed instructions but lacked any dogmatic or universal regulation that would codify the capitalist belief system of the personnel department. Instead, the Catechism consisted of a number of different »Decalogues«, i. e. lists of detailed instructions for specific job profiles that not necessarily consisted of ten commandments, but also of eight or eleven<sup>11</sup>. Despite the claim of absolute religious authority, these handbooks were intended for temporary usage only. Their ideological function remained symbolic.

Regardless of Baťa's secular character and its distance from traditional religion, the company's attempts at shaping the ideal employee relied on the

7 Ilya G. EHRENBURG, *Der Schuhkönig Thomas Bata*, in: *Das Tage-Buch*, 07.11.1931, pp. 1743–1750, at p. 1746.

8 *Zuschrift der Firma Bata, Zlín*, in: *Tage-Buch*, 12.12.1931, pp. 1939–1941, at p. 1940.

9 *Katechismus pro vedoucí oddelení*, [1937], SOkA Zlín, Baťa II/1, kart. 1010, č. 9.

10 Cf. Cynthia PACES/Nancy M. WINGFIELD, *The Sacred and the Profane. Religion and Nationalism in the Bohemian Lands, 1880–1920*, in: Pieter M. JUDSON/Marsha L. ROZENBLIT (eds.), *Constructing Nationalities in East Central Europe*, New York, NY 2004, pp. 107–125, pp. 116–123; Martin SCHULZE WESSEL, *Revolution und religiöser Dissens. Der römisch-katholische und russisch-orthodoxe Klerus als Träger religiösen Wandels in den böhmischen Ländern und in Russland 1848–1922*, München 2011, pp. 118–123.

11 *Katechismus pro vedoucí oddelení*, [1937], SOkA Zlín, Baťa II/1, kart. 1010, č. 9, pp. 8 and 26.

ideologisation of industrial rationalisation. Specific aspects of this ideologisation resembled the cultural production of the sacred<sup>12</sup>. The company's social experiment lasted for more than 20 years and continued under different political regimes, from democratic to authoritarian rule, during the German occupation of 1939–1945 and after Czechoslovakia's liberation. By the late 1930s, the organisational principles of production and management had alluded to a specific form of capitalist ideology that dominated the headquarters in the town of Zlín. It is in this stage of ideology that ideas of generic rationalisation, individual upward social mobility or the cult of the deceased company founder Tomáš Baťa exerted »normative claims over the meanings and conduct of social life«<sup>13</sup> of Baťa employees and underscored their formation as *Baťovci*. Following cultural sociologist Gordon Lynch, these different forms and their normative scope may be considered as expressions of the sacred in modern societies. In the Zlín of 1937, these ideas and role models were perceived as »absolute, non-contingent realities«<sup>14</sup> and exempt from critical debate or even considered worthy of veneration.

This chapter seeks to move beyond the metaphorical usage of religion in the study of political ideologies by focusing on the production of ideology and the sacred as a form of secular transcendence<sup>15</sup>. Such a cultural history approach makes use of the existing literature on social engineering in political ideologies and confronts Baťa's new industrial man with totalitarian examples of new men. In his seminal book *The Sacralization of Politics in Fascist Italy*, Emilio Gentile studied the universe of meaning of Italian Fascism as a political movement and captured the production of the sacred as a transformation of mentality, character and customs<sup>16</sup>. Gentile argued that the Fascist religion did not rely on a single object of sacralization such as the cult of Mussolini, but a variety of factors that included the creation of an ideology, the proliferation of this faith among society and finally »the collective experience of a movement that considered itself invested with a missionary charisma«<sup>17</sup>. This chapter makes use of such research and will put the exam-

12 In addition to the introduction to this volume, see for a definition of sacralization and desacralization as a research concept: Johannes PAULMANN, *Sakralisierung*, in: Martin SABROW/Achim SAUPE (eds.), *Handbuch Historische Authentizität*, Göttingen 2022, pp. 435–443; for an in-depth study of religion in Zlín, see Martin JEMELKA/Jakub ŠTOFANÍK, *Víra a nevíra ve stínu továrních komínů. Náboženský život průmyslového dělnictva v českých zemích (1918–1938)*, Praha 2020.

13 Gordon LYNCH, *The Sacred in the Modern World. A Cultural Sociological Approach*, Oxford 2012, p. 47.

14 *Ibid.*

15 PAULMANN, *Sakralisierung*, pp. 435–437.

16 Emilio GENTILE, *The Sacralization of Politics in fascist Italy*, Cambridge, Mass. 1996, p. ix.

17 *Ibid.*, pp. 132–152, quote p. 132.

ple of Baťa in relation to other projects of an »anthropological revolution«<sup>18</sup>, i. e. Nazi Germany, Soviet Russia and Fascist Italy, and discuss references and transfers between these ideologies and Baťa's project of a new man.

Inquiring into the usage of secular transcendence in Baťa's social engineering, the findings presented in this contribution add to the thriving new research into the cultural history of Baťa and Zlín by studying the interaction between ideology and social practice. In recent years, historians such as Ondřej Ševeček and Martin Jemelka have contributed to our understanding of how Baťa developed Zlín and other company towns as modern functional cities that served as the infrastructure of shaping Baťa employees<sup>19</sup>. Martin Marek and Vít Strobach enquired into the company's human resource management in the late 1930s and revealed how bureaucracy, constant measurement and the categorisation of employability fully developed the project of producing Baťa men at the eve of the Second World War<sup>20</sup>. With his recent book *In the Kingdom of Shoes*, the American historian Zachary Doleshal emphasised the impact of Americanisation and globalisation on Zlín and demonstrated how social engineering provided successful workers and clerks with a sense of belonging to both company and town<sup>21</sup>. With its methodological focus on the ideologisation and sacralization in Baťa's social engineering this chapter contributes to understanding the ideational underpinnings of Baťa and its ideology. It explicates how the social engineering of employees and their families extended towards their »souls« and »hearts«<sup>22</sup>.

18 Emilio GENTILE, *Politics as Religion*, Princeton 2006, p. 46. See also, FRITZSCHE / HELLBECK, *The New Man in Stalinist Russia and Nazi Germany*, p. 304.

19 Ondřej ŠEVEČEK, *Zrození Baťovy průmyslové metropole. Továrna, městský prostor a společnost ve Zlíně v letech 1900–1938*, České Budějovice 2009; Ondřej ŠEVEČEK / Martin JEMELKA (eds.), *Company Towns of the Baťa Concern. History – Cases – Architecture*, Stuttgart 2013; Martin JEMELKA / Ondřej ŠEVEČEK, *Tovární města Baťova koncernu. Evropská kapitola globální expanze*, Praha 2016.

20 MAREK / STROBACH, »Batismus, urychlená modernita a průkopníci práce«; Martin MAREK, *Strategie Baťova koncernu v letech 1938–1939*, in: *Hospodářské dějiny – Economic History* 25 (2010), pp. 167–197; Martin MAREK, *Z baťovského Zlína do světa. Směry transferu a kvalifikační kritéria přesouvaných baťovských zaměstnanců v letech 1938–1941*, in: *Moderní dějiny* 18 (2010), pp. 157–197; Vít STROBACH / Martin MAREK, *Batismus a »židovská otázka« na přelomu 30. a 40. let dvacátého století*, in: Petr PÁLKA (ed.), *Židé a Morava XVII. Sedmnáctý svazek ediční řady Židé a Morava: kniha statí ze stejnojmenné konference konané v Muzeu Kroměřížska dne 10.11.2010*, Kroměříž 2011, pp. 233–240; Martin MAREK / Vít STROBACH, *Identity, Discipline and Order in the Baťa Concern*, in: ŠEVEČEK / JEMELKA (eds.), *Company Towns of the Baťa Concern*, pp. 51–60.

21 DOLESHAL, *In the Kingdom of Shoes*.

22 For the concept of »soul engineering«, see Klaus GESTWA, *Social und Soul Engineering unter Stalin und Chruschtschow, 1928–1964*, in: Thomas ETZEMUELLER (ed.), *Die Ordnung der Moderne. Social engineering im 20. Jahrhundert*, Bielefeld 2009, pp. 241–277.

This contribution will proceed in seven steps. First, it will provide an introduction to the history of Baťa as a global shoe company and the development of modern Zlín as its headquarters and model company town. Second, the chapter will define rationalisation as the core of Baťa's ideology and explicate how the company's organisational principles of industrial production extended towards workers and their families. It will, third, analyse the disciplinary and bureaucratic practices that embedded social engineering into personnel management and discuss, fourth, how Baťa's »new industrial man« was celebrated in mass festivals and made a role model for the entire country of Czechoslovakia. Fifth, the contribution enquires into the appropriation of such models by employees themselves and discusses, sixth, how Baťa social engineering was adopted by both Nazis and Communists. In conclusion, the chapter argues that the ambivalent ideology of Batism and the cult of Tomáš Baťa fostered processes of sacralization and served to strengthen the position of the shoe company Baťa in Zlín, yet only had a limited impact on Czech society.

### 1. Social Engineering in the Town of Shoes

In less than a generation, the small town of Zlín in the valley of the Dřevnice river changed ultimately. When the young shoemaker Tomáš Baťa founded a new enterprise together with his sister and brother in 1894, his home town was a rural market place in Eastern Moravia known for its artisan shoe productions. In the following years, Baťa developed the company under the family name into the world leader in shoe production and transformed Zlín into a functional, highly modernist company town. At the beginning, Baťa used the existing skill set and the local artisan labour force in the town to transform the production of shoes from a manufacturing and workshop system to an industrial, factory-based model<sup>23</sup>. By 1908, Tomáš Baťa was running the company on his own and based his business on the production of cheap and affordable shoes. His trademark product, the so-called *Batovky*, was a linen shoe with a simple leather sole made from cheap and excess material that differed greatly from the heavy artisan shoes that the rural population of Moravia wore mostly during winter and on festive occasions. Baťa's products made footwear available for wider strata of society and selling them at half the price of other producers and established shoes as a consumer product<sup>24</sup>.

23 DOLEŠAL, In the Kingdom of Shoes, pp. 21f.

24 Cf. Josef HONS, ... und es war eine Sache der Bubenehre, barfuß zu gehen ..., in: Jana Losová (ed.), *Kindheit in Böhmen und Mähren*, Wien 1996, pp. 188–208.

In the 1920s and 1930s, Baťa replicated this strategy in emerging markets in the global south and hoped to sell shoes to the one »half of people in the world who walked on bare feet«<sup>25</sup>.

When in October 1918 the Republic of Czechoslovakia was founded, Baťa was the biggest shoe company in the new country. During the First World War, Baťa had produced military boots for the Habsburg army, which increased production significantly to nearly 6,000 boots a day at the end of the war. In addition to trained artisan shoemakers, Baťa increasingly hired young men from the neighbouring villages as unskilled labourers. In the context of wartime scarcity, the company began to provide the necessary infrastructure in the rapidly growing town such as catering meals for its employees<sup>26</sup>. By 1919, the company employed around 5,000 men and women in Zlín, a number that would increase to 29,000 in 1938. To support the massive growth of the labour force, Baťa began to organise not only catering but also housing, shops and all forms of free-time activities for the workers and their families. Around the factory, Baťa built both modernist high-density dormitories for workers and workers' settlements comprised of small family cottages with a garden. Moreover, the company had set up social infrastructures such as malls, cinemas, and sports fields. Zlín turned into a modernist company town that attracted visitors from across Europe and was applauded by experts and enthusiasts of rational planning<sup>27</sup>.

Tomáš Baťa's social welfare policy aimed to shape workers and poses a pivotal example of social engineering. Patriarchal welfare had been a common phenomenon since the early days of industrialisation. But from the 1920s onwards, the planned and scientifically informed engineering of the work routines and everyday lives of human beings became a phenomenon shared around the globe and in various political regimes, including democratic countries such as Sweden<sup>28</sup>. Borrowing from the historian Thomas Etzemüller,

25 Tomáš BAŤA, *Úvahy a projevy*, Praha 2013, p. 262.

26 DOLEŠAL, *In the Kingdom of Shoes*, pp. 47f.

27 ŠEVEČEK, *Zrození Baťovy průmyslové*, pp. 226–261; Ondřej ŠEVEČEK, *Introductory Remarks*, in: ŠEVEČEK / JEMELKA (eds.), *Company Towns of the Baťa Concern*, pp. 15–47.

28 See, Charles S. MAIER, *Between Taylorism and Technocracy. European Ideologies and the Vision of Industrial Productivity in the 1920s*, in: *Journal of Contemporary History* 5/2 (1970), pp. 27–61; Adelheid von SALDERN, »Alles ist möglich«. Fordismus – ein visionäres Ordnungsmodell des 20. Jahrhunderts, in: Lutz RAPHAEL (ed.), *Theorien und Experimente der Moderne. Europas Gesellschaften im 20. Jahrhundert*, Köln 2012, pp. 155–192; David E. GREENSTEIN, *Assembling »Fordizm«*. The Production of Automobiles, Americans, and Bolsheviks in Detroit and Early Soviet Russia, in: *Comparative Studies in Society and History* 56 (2014), pp. 259–289; Thomas ETZEMUELLER, *Alva and Gunnar Myrdal. Social Engineering in the Modern World*, Lanham, Md. 2014; David KUCHENBUCH, *Geordnete Gemeinschaft. Architekten als Sozialingenieure – Deutschland und Schweden im 20. Jahrhundert*, Bielefeld 2010.

it can be best described as social engineering. Following Etzemüller, such attempts at engineering entire societies comprise a set of administrative practices and ways of decisionist thought. It includes several related elements, most of which were present in any given context of social engineering, such as the perception of societal crisis, the emphasis on scientific expertise, the habitus of rationality, the utilisation of industrial standardisation and classification, and the visualisation of knowledge<sup>29</sup>. Understood as a Foucauldian dispositive, social engineering targeted entire populations and yet enlisted individuals to actively partake in the production of society, seen as an organic community.

The political and social domination of Zlín was a fundamental prerequisite for successful social engineering in the company town. In 1923, Tomáš Baťa ran at the head of a company slate in the municipal elections. He won the office of Mayor and his slate of leading employees won a landslide victory and a majority in the city council. In the following years, the company took over public administration and the municipal police and became the de-facto ruler of Zlín<sup>30</sup>. Baťa now sought to control not only the factory compound and company housing but also to (re)shape the entire public space of Zlín. In this vein, municipal authorities successfully restricted the number of pubs and other places of alcohol consumption and limited local production of alcohol. They also policed illegal taverns and strongly enforced administrative regulations, for instance against unlicensed street sellers, including the selling of fruits. Using its new statutory powers, the company thus moved to control the hygiene, nutrition and free-time activities of workers<sup>31</sup>. Starting in the mid-1920s, the company also gained control over most of Zlín's residential space and used this to exclude *personae non gratae* from the town. Linking rental agreements in company housing with jobs meant that employees who

29 Thomas ETZEMUELLER, Social Engineering als Verhaltenslehre des kühlen Kopfes. Eine einleitende Skizze, in: Id. (ed.), Die Ordnung der Moderne. Social engineering im 20. Jahrhundert, Bielefeld 2009, pp. 11–39. See also, Jon ALEXANDER et al., Social Engineering. Genealogy of a Concept, in: Adam PODGORECKI et al. (eds.), Social Engineering, Montreal 1996, pp. 1–19; Benjamin ZIEMANN et al., Introduction: The Scientization of the Social in Comparative Perspective, in: Kerstin BRUECKWEH et al. (eds.), Engineering society. The role of the human and social sciences in modern societies, 1880–1980, Basingstoke 2012, S. 1–40.

30 For an analysis of Baťa's cultural sovereignty, see Gregor FEINDT, Eine »ideale Industriestadt« für »neue tschechische Menschen«. Batas Zlín zwischen Planung und Alltag, 1925–1945, in: Id./Bernhard GISSIBL/Johannes PAULMANN (eds.), Kulturelle Souveränität. Politische Deutungs- und Handlungsmacht jenseits des Staates im 20. Jahrhundert, Göttingen 2017, pp. 109–132; Gregor FEINDT/Bernhard GISSIBL/Johannes PAULMANN et al., Introduction. Cultural sovereignty – Claims, Forms and Contexts beyond the Modern State, in: European History Yearbook 21 (2020), pp. 1–20.

31 DOLESHAL, In the Kingdom of Shoes, pp. 76f.



lost their jobs were also forced to leave the town<sup>32</sup>. In addition to the unemployed, Baťa excluded from Zlín those who were deemed disruptive to the social order instituted by the company. Municipal police tracked down Communist and trade union activists despite the fact that both activities were legal in Czechoslovakia until 1938. Additionally, the company targeted and expelled from town homeless people, who were arrested for begging, Roma families, who were considered criminals without any need of proof, and women who were accused of promiscuity or sex work<sup>33</sup>. Zlín was to become a purely functionalist town shaped exclusively for the *Baťovci*.

## 2. Rationalisation as Ideology and Ritual

After the end of wartime production, Baťa moved to rationalise shoe production by introducing scientific management in 1919. Five years later, in 1924, the factory was organised according to Fordist principles. By the 1930s, rationalisation became the guiding episteme for the entire company and permeated other fields of activity, from labour management to housing policy and education. Moreover, Baťa employees came to perceive rationalisation as a guide idea that reached beyond work and could impact their private lives. Rationalisation had become the central ritual of the company ideology.

From the beginning of the twentieth century, American industrial companies served as role models for organising factories and developing new ways of production in the Bohemian lands. As early as 1900, Tomáš Baťa imported simple machines from Germany in an attempt at moving beyond the traditional putting-out system of artisan shoe production. Between 1904 and 1906, the company founder went overseas together with a group of employees to work and live in Lynn, Massachusetts, then the global epicentre of industrial shoe production and a prime example of industrial paternalism<sup>34</sup>. Just after the First World War, Baťa visited Ford's car plant in River Rouge in 1919 and learned about the conveyor belt that he would then implement in Zlín a few years later. Embracing the example of Henry Ford was no exception at that time, as the enthusiastic reception of Fordist production shaped debates about rationalised production across Europe, giving rise to a discourse of transnational Fordism that was quite independent of Ford's own innovations<sup>35</sup>. In this vein, both the »boss«, as Tomáš Baťa was commonly

32 ŠEVEČEK, Zrození Baťovy průmyslové, p. 236.

33 DOLESHAL, In the Kingdom of Shoes, pp. 139–143 and pp. 149–152.

34 Ibid., pp. 33–39.

35 DOLESHAL, In the Kingdom of Shoes, pp. 57f. For the transnational imagination of Fordism, see Stefan J. LINK, Forging Global Fordism. Nazi Germany, Soviet Russia, and the Contest over the Industrial Order, Princeton 2020, pp. 51–58.

referred to by his employees, and the Baťa company as a collective actor learned from Ford, and in fact laid the foundations for the Czechoslovak encounter with Fordism. In 1924, they arranged for Ford's bestselling autobiography *My life and work* to be translated into Czech and had excerpts reprinted in the company's weekly newspaper<sup>36</sup>.

Baťa also applied scientific methods to rationalise the management of personnel. In 1920, the company introduced intelligence tests as a standardised recruitment tool and began to assess applicants for both blue and white-collar jobs, including young apprentices, with this new method of assessment<sup>37</sup>. Determining the ability of young men – in the 1920s women were rarely tested, as the company assigned them for manual labour only – with scientific methods was equalizing in that it disregarded the social and ethnic background or the formal education of the applicants. For experts and politicians, such a seemingly objective approach promised to uncover hidden and unused talent for the emerging state of Czechoslovakia<sup>38</sup>. For Baťa, such scientific recruitment methods had more immediate benefits: they allowed the company to identify potential employees among local, mostly poor youths and offer them decent employment and a career path that would be otherwise closed to them. Working in Zlín for years, those employees who had taken up the company's offer of employment and internalised its ideology would form the core cadre of Baťa's social engineering project. They would be celebrated as embodying the ideal company employee.

In these early years, Baťa aimed to produce »pioneers«, male employees who would take up the rationality of industrial production and promote these ideas beyond Zlín. Following the ideal type of the American self-made man, the employee-pioneer had learned his skills on the job. He received no relevant formal education and proved himself capable of different tasks in the factory<sup>39</sup>. The value of a Baťa education, however, had to be proven outside of Zlín. Pioneers would leave the company at some point and pursue a

36 Cf. John BARTOŠ, *Prače a život dělnictva Fordových zavodů*, in: *Sdělení*, 07.06.1924; Henry FORD, *Fordovy ideály*, Praha 1924; id., *Můj život a dílo*, Praha 1924; id., *Můj život a dílo*, in: *Sdělení*, 13.02.1926, pp. 2 and 4.

37 MAREK/STROBACH, »Batismus, urychlená modernita a průkopníci práce«, pp. 119f. Cf. Application forms used in 1926, SOkA Zlín, Baťa II/2, kart. 1076, i. č. 32, por. č. 1, p. 2. For a sample from the mid-1930s, see, *Dotazník*, n. d., SOkA Zlín, Baťa II/5, kart. 1192, i. č. 39, pp. 58–61.

38 Elisabeth van MEER, *Engineering beyond Politics? Professional Ideology, Scientific Management and the Evolution of Czechoslovakia, 1848–1948*, unpublished dissertation, University of Minnesota 2006, pp. 104–108. Cf. For a wider context of measuring ability: John CARSON, *The Measure of Merit. Talents, Intelligence, and Inequality in the French and American Republics, 1750–1940*, Princeton 2006, pp. 246–253; Bernd STIEGLER, *Der montierte Mensch. Eine Figur der Moderne*, Paderborn 2016, pp. 41f.

39 BAŤA, *Úvahy a projevy*, pp. 30f.

career elsewhere or start their own businesses. The company's newspapers regularly presented successful biographies of former or current employees, claiming that Baťa and its pioneers not only served the company's profits but also the alleged greater good of the country<sup>40</sup>.

The prime example of such an exemplary employee was the founder Tomáš Baťa himself. With his frequent public addresses and numerous op-eds in the company newspapers *Sdělení* and (from 1930 onwards) *Zlín*, Baťa defined norms for his employees and explicated the principles of the organisation of production, the pursuit of individual wealth, and the salience of practical education. After his death in a plane accident on 12 July 1932, the company announced that »our first employee has fallen« and praised the founder as a benevolent and efficient patriarch who had worked with »tireless dedication« and »the mind of a genius« to »serve the public and his co-workers«<sup>41</sup>. Despite such attempts at glorification, the public ideological legacy of Tomáš Baťa lacked intellectual originality, precision or consistency and mostly focused on reiterating values such as self-optimisation, initiative and loyalty. Baťa did not even present a comprehensive, ghost-written biography of its founder, unlike Henry Ford's bestselling *My Life and Work*. Instead, Tomáš Baťa's *Reflections and Speeches* contained a 12-page long autobiographical sketch entitled »How I began« that served as the introduction to a posthumous collection of anecdotes, contributions and public addresses<sup>42</sup>. Tomáš Baťa's intellectual world and legacy remained eclectic, but were nevertheless central to his cult, chiefly advanced by his successor and stepbrother Jan Antonín Baťa. The cult of the founder, with its emphasis on hard work, personal development and loyalty towards the company maintained Tomáš Baťa's legacy but also served to legitimise Jan's rule over the company and his radicalisation of its social engineering in the 1930s<sup>43</sup>.

40 Cf. SOKA Zlín, Baťa II/2, kart. 1046, i. č. 51.

41 Spolupracovníci! Padl náš první spolupracovník, in: *Zlín*, 12.07.1932, p. 1.

42 BAŤA, Úvahy a projevy. The book was published in 1932, shortly after Baťa's death and translated into German four years later. An English translation circulated in the company's Indian branch but was never published with a commercial publisher. A new English translation was published by the Tomáš Baťa Foundation and is available online, Tomáš BAŤA, Reflections and Speeches, Zlín 2016, URL: <[http://tomas-bata.org/wp-content/uploads/download/reflections\\_and\\_speeches.pdf](http://tomas-bata.org/wp-content/uploads/download/reflections_and_speeches.pdf)> (10-04-2022).

43 Jan Baťa soon began to present his ideas, see J. A. BAŤA, Práce a spolupráce. Zaměstnavatele se zaměstnanci, Zlín 1933; id., Spolupráce. Výbor z článků a projevů v letech 1920–1936, Zlín 1936.

The rationalisation of personnel management was not limited to the recruitment phase but turned into a ritual of categorising employees. The personnel department relied extensively on quantitative data such as productivity numbers, wages and quantified evaluation results as a tool to identify able and successful workers<sup>44</sup>. Such processes formalised a repetitive sequence of standardising evaluation and the public performance of the results in order to portray them as objective, resulting in the essential categorisation of the assessed apprentices, workers and clerks<sup>45</sup>. Building on patterns of industrial production such processes stood for a twofold ritualisation: a bureaucratic ritual of decision making that created a sense of ideology and belonging within administrative departments and the extension as a public ritual that marked off those employees suitable for promotion as *Baťovci* »on the rise«<sup>46</sup>.

Until 1937, the company refrained from proclaiming an official ideology of its own. Yet, it nourished an informal system of beliefs that included the rituals of rationalisation, but also scripts of individual upward social mobility and the cult of personality around the founder. This informal ideology is frequently referred to as Batism (*Batismus* in Czech), a term that was often used in a derogatory and propagandistic meaning by Socialist critics of both company and boss. However, the term was also taken up by recent scholarship on the topic. For instance, Czech historians Martin Marek and Vít Strobach defined Batism as »a discursive formation« that fostered a specific identity for Baťa employees in Zlín and aimed at transforming them into »ideal (and also *normalised*) members of the company collective«<sup>47</sup>. Along this line, sociologist Petr Kunst perceived Batism as a management system that established an atmosphere of high efficiency and permanent labour competition to stimulate vertical mobility and was endorsed by most of the Baťa employees, often regardless of their position and individual success<sup>48</sup>. Borrowing from political theorist Michael Freeden, Batism can be analysed as an ideology as it exhibited a recurring pattern of decision-making with regard to production and personnel and was rooted in a wider belief in progress and rational planning shared by technocratic and political elites not

44 Dominik ČIPERA, *Novoročné*, 22.12.1934, SOKA Zlín, Baťa II/1, kart. 1009, i. č. 5, p. 7. Cf. Alain DESROSIÈRES / Camille NAISH, *The politics of large numbers. A history of statistical reasoning*, Cambridge, MA 1998.

45 Talcott PARSONS, *The Social System*, London <sup>2</sup>1991, pp. 41f. Cf. Stefan HIRSCHAUER, *Menschen unterscheiden. Grundlinien einer Theorie der Humandifferenzierung*, in: *Zeitschrift für Soziologie* 50 (2021), pp. 155–174, at p. 156; Johannes PAULMANN, *Researching the History of Social Differentiation and Human Categorization*, in: *European History Yearbook* 22 (2021), pp. 121–142, at pp. 133f.

46 Catherine BELL, *Ritual. Perspectives and Dimensions*, New York 1997, pp. 59f.

47 MAREK / STROBACH, »Batismus, urychlená modernita a průkopníci práce«, p. 104.

48 Petr KUNST, *Batismus*, in: *Sociologická encyklopedie*, ed. by Zdeněk R. NEŠPOR, URL: <<https://encyklopedie.soc.cas.cz/w/Batismus>> (10-04-2022).

only in Czechoslovakia. Moreover, as we will see in the following sections, this ideology in fact competed with other political options over providing and controlling plans for public policy and successfully changed the processes of Zlín's local political community<sup>49</sup>.

### 3. Shaping the Ideal Employee

For the Baťa company, shaping the ideal employee was not limited to production or testing but included vocational training, company housing and even surveillance of the employees' private lives. Baťa aimed for a healthy and intelligent, young and ambitious employee who would start a modern, nuclear family in the company town and rise through the company's ranks. Most of all this prototype of the Baťa was loyal and, in the late 1930s, strict ideological allegiance to Batism added to the profile. Rationalising health, hygiene and nutrition, however, led the project of social engineering towards the aesthetics of Fascist masculinity<sup>50</sup>.

The ideal employee began as a man of learning and experience. Soon after Tomáš Baťa took the office of mayor in 1923, he confronted the town's school principal over how to prepare pupils for future employment in the shoe factory. When the boss failed to implement his own curriculum in the state school, he started his own vocational schools in 1926 and made the new »Baťa School of Work« a formative ground for ideal employees. Aiming at apprentices, the school admitted 14-year-old boys, and from 1929 on also girls, who had just fulfilled compulsory education but not yet worked. Over four years, the youths followed a strict daily routine that included eight hours of practical training in the factory and several additional hours of vocational schooling in the evenings and at weekends. The »young men« and »young women«, as they were called in the company jargon, lived in dormitories and spent most of their spare time in groups and organised recreational activities such as sport, cultural clubs or outings to the countryside<sup>51</sup>.

While such strict daily routines were a well-established practice in traditional boarding schools and newly founded totalitarian elite schools, the degree of centralised surveillance in Zlín was extraordinary when we

49 Michael FREEDEN, *Ideology. A Very Short Introduction*, Oxford et al. 2003, p. 32, see also id., *Ideology and Political Theory*, in: *Journal of Political Ideologies* 1 (2006), pp. 3–22.

50 George LACHMANN MOSSE, *The image of man. The creation of modern masculinity*, Oxford 1996, pp. 155–180.

51 Dana KASPEROVÁ, *Výchova průmyslového člověka a firma Baťa v meziválečném Zlíně*, Liberec 2014, pp. 96–100; DOLEŠAL, *In the Kingdom of Shoes*, pp. 155f.

remember that it was a private company<sup>52</sup>. Educators and older apprentices supervised the work, learning and conduct of youths. They evaluated the tidiness of rooms and personal belongings, enforced the prohibition on the consumption of alcohol and tobacco and monitored the movements and romantic relationships of the youths – as leaving the dormitories in general required permission. Pupils also needed authorisation when they wanted to spend the money that they had earned in the factories. Most of these earnings was transferred to a compulsory saving scheme with only pocket money left, and the young men and women were required to keep a cash-book and account for every purchase of clothes, consumer goods or even additional food that they had made<sup>53</sup>. The personnel department kept comprehensive personnel files in order to document the progress of employees and any act of deviance or misbehaviour – a bureaucratic practice that was introduced in 1919 and comprised each and every employee by the end of the 1920s. In addition, the school also kept special files that documented the life and behaviour of pupils, and evaluated their handling of money, personal hygiene, and loyalty towards the company<sup>54</sup>. Regularly deviant or inefficient young men and women were reported to the personnel department and threatened with dismissal.

With its strict discipline, the School of Work also aimed at producing a new working body, emphasizing sports, hygiene, healthy nutrition, and personal discipline that would facilitate the new bodily practices. Each day began with 15 minutes of exercise and sporting competition were regular weekend activities for both boys and girls. Educators oversaw how the young men and women washed themselves in the mornings and ensured that their clothing was clean and impeccable whenever they left the dormitory. As all meals were catered in canteens, the company also regulated what and how the young employees would eat and gave preference to strong and hearty breakfast in comparison to a lighter lunch and supper<sup>55</sup>. Company instructions to pupils were often titled *Change yourself* and framed hygiene, clothing and

52 John Raymond de SYMONS HONEY, Tom Brown's universe. The Development of the English Public School in the nineteenth Century, London 1977; Helen ROCHE, The Third Reich's Elite Schools. A History of the Napolas, Oxford 2021, pp. 72–81.

53 Cf. Ludvík VACULÍK, Milí spolužáci! Výbor písemných prací 1939–1979, vol. 2 Kniha dělnická. Deník a dopisy 1941–1945, Köln 1986, p. 46; František BOBÁK, Zlínská jitra. Minipovídky, fejetony, eseje, Praha 2015, p. 201; Bohuslav HARAŠTA, Učení mučení. Vzpomínky na dobu trávenou fy Baťa Zlín jako mladý muž Baťovy školy práce, Dokumentation lebensgeschichtlicher Aufzeichnungen, Prague 1991, pp. 33f.

54 See i. e., Záznamy o chování mladého muže, SOkA Zlín, Baťa II/2, kart. 1133, i. č. 99, Záznamy o chování mladého muže, SOkA Zlín, Baťa II/2, kart. 1134, i. č. 100.

55 DOLEŠAL, In the Kingdom of Shoes, p. 154. Complaints about the lack of cleanliness regularly appeared in reports about the behavior of apprentices. [Note], SOkA Zlín, Baťa II/2, kart 001033, i. č. 17, por. č. 74, p. 5; Záznamy o chování mladého

nutrition as technologies of the self in the sense of Michel Foucault, i. e. daily normative practices that both disciplined the pupils and made them discipline themselves<sup>56</sup>. At first, the introduction of new bodily practices in the dormitories was geared towards individual productivity but over time the programme created a uniform model of masculinity. Pupils were expected to aim for the model of the ideal male worker turned administrative employee at Baťa. This *Batovec* would look healthy, wear a modern suit and polished shoes, have a clean shave and also have what was perceived as an orderly, rational appearance<sup>57</sup>.

Over time, the company established a degree of surveillance in Zlín's family neighbourhoods that was similar to that of the dormitories. Baťa developed its own functionalist housing for Zlín's growing population and by 1931 provided more than 71 % of living space in the town. Employees could expect to be offered a modern house or flat shortly after they began working in Zlín or married while on the job<sup>58</sup>. In 1934, the company established a new social department that would visit workers in their homes and report their health, living conditions and family relations or mark the furnishing and appearance of the apartments. In addition to this, five inspectors and around 200 spies reported any behaviour deemed improper in the family neighbourhoods, such as extra-marital sexuality, alcoholism or gambling<sup>59</sup>. While this repressive morality mirrored the company's strict regime in the dormitories, the social engineering in these neighbourhoods was intended to ensure a harmonic family life and to prevent any distraction from work duties. For employees, the absence of any documented cases of improper conduct in their everyday life outside the factory amounted to an unwritten certification of moral behaviour that complemented the written documentation of professional qualifications and skills and both determined workers' careers<sup>60</sup>.

muže, SokA Zlín, Baťa II/2, kart. 1133, i. č. 99; Záznamy o chování mladého muže, SokA Zlín, Baťa II/2, kart. 1133, i. č. 99. For an account on personal hygiene, appearance and food see the life-reports of a young men. HARAŠTA, Učení mučení, pp. 20f.

56 Luther H. MARTIN et al. (eds.), *Technologies of the Self. A Seminar with Michel Foucault*, Amherst, Mass. 1988; Philipp SARASIN, *Reizbare Maschinen. Eine Geschichte des Körpers 1765–1914*, Frankfurt a. M. 2001, p. 252.

57 Zachary Austin DOLESHAL, *Only the Clean are Strong. The Baťa Company's Project to Remake Masculinity in the Dřevnice Valley*, in: *Sextures* 4 (2014), p. 14–29; MOSE, *The Image of Man*, pp. 133–138.

58 ŠEVEČEK, *Zrození Baťovy průmyslové*, p. 237. For the distribution of flats to young families, see Stanislav KŘEČEK, *Má dáti – dal. Účtoval jsem u Baťů*, Zlín 2015, p. 82; See Absolvent, 10.11.1938, SokA Zlín, Baťa II/2, kart. 1076, i. č. 32, por. č. 1, p. 12; [Note], SokA Zlín, Baťa II kartotéky, kart. 1036, i. č. 18, por. č. 3; [Personal profile], 09.09.1935, SokA Zlín, Baťa II kartotéky, kart. 1036, i. č. 18, por. č. 6, p. 2.

59 DOLESHAL, *In the Kingdom of Shoes*, pp. 137f. and pp. 160f.

60 MAREK/STROBACH, *»Batismus, urychlená modernita a průkopníci práce«*, pp. 121f.; DOLESHAL, *In the Kingdom of Shoes*, pp. 96f.

In addition to maintaining healthy bodies and harmonious family lives, employees were expected to be loyal and devoted followers of Batism, in Zlín and beyond. This devotion and commitment was to replace existing ways of life, social ties, and political commitments. For most workers from rural Moravia, life in the modernist and anonymous Zlín was a stark contrast to their previous life, both in terms of the standard of living and to social norms. Just as the School of Work deliberately separated young men and women from their families in order to undermine the influence of family structures, the company devaluated other traditional institutions in Zlín's public life such as the Catholic Church or even the Czechoslovak state<sup>61</sup>. Instead, the company itself assumed the role of producing meaning and serving as a normative institution for the *Baťovci* not only with regard to their bodies and behaviour but also their beliefs. In an educational manifesto from around 1938 the company demanded: »A young heart will rejoice at the ideas of our boss and will be a faithful speaker and carrier of these ideas«<sup>62</sup>. The image of the »faithful speaker« fell short of what Emilio Gentile characterised as »warrior-disciple of a religion«<sup>63</sup>, i. e. the propagandist effort of an ideal new fascist man, yet it reveals a new trajectory of Baťa's social engineering in the late 1930s. After years of engineering the ideal employee, Baťa openly aimed for their souls and admitted to ideological indoctrination. Having focused on Zlín, the company now sought to extend its teachings beyond the factory town and hoped to use the *Baťovci* to spread its message across Czechoslovakia.

#### 4. Celebrating the »New industrial Man«

Public celebrations provided a forum to stage the *Baťovci* as modern, healthy and »new« men. After 1924, May Day became the most important annual festival for Baťa and Zlín. On this day, a national holiday in Czechoslovakia since 1919, the company showcased its economic and social achievements, global ambitions and plans for the future of Zlín and Czechoslovakia. In its aesthetics and performance, Baťa's rallies in the 1930s resembled the totalitarian mass festivals of the Soviet Union, Nazi Germany or Fascist Italy and attracted significant attention from the general public. Unique in their orchestration by a private company, the rallies in Zlín became by 1937 a stage

61 JEMELKA / ŠTOFANÍK, *Víra a nevíra ve stínu továrních komínů*, pp. 202–206 and pp. 415–417.

62 *Výchova průmyslového člověka*, undated, SOkA Zlín, Baťa II/5, kart. 1192, i. č. 39.

63 GENTILE, *The Sacralization of Politics in fascist Italy*, p. 65.



for the propagation of a new, ideological level of social engineering, i. e. the extension of Baťa's ambitions to the entire country of Czechoslovakia<sup>64</sup>.

Tomáš Baťa introduced the May Day gathering in 1924 to propagate the close ties between management and workers, united by the shared conviction of what was to become Batism. Originally framed as a belated birthday party for the boss, the first event took place in his garden as an informal company picnic. Over the next years, the event took to the streets of Zlín, attracted larger crowds and resonated across the region. By 1926, May Day celebrations became a significant investment for Baťa, and events were widely covered in the national press including detailed reports on the Zlín May Day and reprints of the speeches of the company founder<sup>65</sup>. Here, Tomáš Baťa addressed his employees as »citizens« of Zlín, »co-workers« (*spolupracovníci*) of the shoe company or simply as »friends« and thus omitted to identify them as his dependents with their professional status as workers (*dělníci*)<sup>66</sup>. At the same time, the boss spoke about the love of labour, how every single employee worked towards their own individual happiness, their family's welfare and the general prosperity. In opposition to potentially conflictual labour relations, Baťa portrayed his company as a »working family« and assumed the role of the benevolent patriarch<sup>67</sup>.

By appropriating the traditional protest day of the workers' movement, the company also challenged the influence of Social Democrats and Communists in Zlín. After the successful takeover of the city, the company targeted the legal Communist Party (KŠC) and, in collaboration with municipal police, drove trade unions, agitators and Communist workers out of the city. When the Communists requested to hold a May Day rally in 1936, municipal authorities allowed a small gathering at a bus stop in significant distance from the Baťa celebrations on the central labour square<sup>68</sup>. This strategy of appropriating rival political symbols and policing ideological opponents

64 DOLESHAL, In the Kingdom of Shoes, pp. 3–6; Malte ROLF, Soviet Mass Festivals. 1917–1991, Pittsburgh 2013, pp. 155–179.

65 DOLESHAL, In the Kingdom of Shoes, pp. 74f. As several newspapers printed similar or identical texts in Czech, Slovak or German we can assume that the company commissioned these publications. Cf. Der 1. Mai bei der Firma Baťa, Deutsche Arbeiterzeitung (Saaz), 30.04.1926; První máj firmy Baťa, Moravský Večerník, 29.04.1926; Der 1. Mai bei Baťa, Pressburger Zeitung, 11.05.1927; Baťov sviatok Práce, Robotnické noviny (Bratislava), 12.05.1929. For a selection on newspaper clips, see SOKA Zlín, Baťa II/8, kart. 1115, i. č. 274.

66 Přátelé!, in: Sdělení, 01.05.1925, p. 1; Tomáš BAŤA, Přátelé spolupracovníci, in: Sdělení, 08.05.1926, p. 1–2; id., Občané, in: Sdělení, 01.05.1927, Beilage; Proslov p. chefa, in: Sdělení, 01.05.1928, p. 1; only in 1924, Baťa used the terms »workers« or »work force« (*dělnictvo*). Občané – dělníci!, in: Sdělení, 03.05.1924.

67 BAŤA, Přátelé spolupracovníci.

68 DOLESHAL, In the Kingdom of Shoes, pp. 139–143.

displayed the company's hegemony over Zlín<sup>69</sup>. On May Day, Baťa both contributed and provided an alternative to well established political ideologies.

Under Tomáš' successor Jan Baťa, the rally turned into a show of the company's power, becoming one of the biggest rallies in Czechoslovakia with more than 100,000 participants and spectators. In 1933, the first festival after the death of Tomáš Baťa fostered the emerging cult of personality around the company's founder. Young men and women were at the centre of this new performance of Batism, which comprised a procession to the grave of Tomáš Baťa, the ritual singing of the national anthem and a public display of mass choreographies. Marching through the street of Zlín, apprentices and workers but also pensioners pledged their allegiance to Tomáš Baťa's teachings and symbolically passed his mission on to the next generation. As part of this turn towards the ritual, the marching *Baťovci* appropriated the Socialist slogan *Buď práci čest!* («Praised be the work») and gathered behind the affirmation of relentless labour that was derived from Tomáš Baťa's life and work<sup>70</sup>. The language of these performances began to follow a belligerent narrative of progress, a fight against poverty and bondage in which the *Baťovci* could make a difference<sup>71</sup>. Under Jan Baťa, May Day in Zlín had lost its familiar atmosphere and become a display of political ambition and ideological determination.

In 1937, Jan Baťa addressed the nation with a plan for a global Czechoslovakia and brought forward a turn in the company ideology. For years, Baťa's May Day had spotlighted foreign employees and acclaimed the global network of subsidiary factories. But in that year's May Day event, the second boss returned from a four-month-long round trip around the world with new revelations about Czechoslovakia itself. In a short address in front of 140,000 people, Baťa urged president Beneš and the entire country to make foreign trade the priority of the Czechoslovak economy. »We *Baťovci* must become a role model in this, because we understand from our own experience that export is the fitting existence for the whole Czechoslovak people, as well as for all Europeans«<sup>72</sup>. On the same day, the second boss published a pamphlet entitled *Let us Build a State for 40 Million People* in which he elaborated on his ideas in more detail. He suggested a huge infrastructure programme and the increased construction of motorways, waterways and

69 ROLF, Soviet Mass Festivals.

70 Pavel HORÁK, První máj, in: Dagmar HÁJKOVÁ et al. (eds.), Sláva republice! Oficiální svátky a oslavy v meziválečném Československu, Praha 2018, pp. 229–267, at p. 245; Buď práci čest!, in: Zlín, 29.04.1936, p. 1.

71 Martin MAREK, Práci čest. 1. máje ve Zlíně – Gottwaldově, Brno 2020, p. 18. Cf. Průkopníci, in: Zlín, 02.05.1933; Výběr a výchova průmyslového člověka, 1938, SokA Zlín, Baťa II/1, i. č. 17, pp. 11–25.

72 J. A. BAŤA, Vývozem k blahobytu státu, in: Zlín, 03.05.1937, p. 3.

railway tracks to strengthen the economy and unify the country across its length of 820 km<sup>73</sup>. For Czechoslovakia's youth, Baťa proposed new trade and vocational schooling, an obvious reference to the School of Work<sup>74</sup>. This hypermodern vision of Czechoslovakia extended the example of Zlín to the entire country. Written in an accessible language, with abundant illustration and overly enthusiastic claims, the book »marked a dramatic leap onto the national stage for Jan's evolving concept of Batism«<sup>75</sup>.

At the same time, Jan Baťa began an internal renewal of Batism that made the company ideology a universal guideline for industrial development. In December 1937, Baťa discussed a holistic approach to social engineering with personnel managers, and in the following months, the personnel department produced several new handbooks and scripts that systematised the existing guidelines and protocols<sup>76</sup>. Aiming at the internal audience of managers only, these new documents opened with a foundational story and embedded the efforts of producing the ideal employee into a grand historical narrative of industrial progress. The handbook *Selection and Education of the Industrial Man* rendered the introduction of machines, i. e. the decisive step for the development of Baťa since 1900, a form of liberation of mankind: »The machine freed the human being from serfdom (*poroba*)«<sup>77</sup>. Collecting well-known quotes of Tomáš and Jan Baťa, the handbook mixed these with ideas and short texts of international intellectuals, thus buttressing the authority of the company's two bosses. The increasing ambition of the company was expressed here for the first time through the term of the »industrial man« or even »new industrial man«, which was hitherto unknown in Zlín. Although in line with older images of the *Baťovec*, this notion was now explicitly expanded to the whole of society<sup>78</sup>.

Despite this internal sacralization and obvious allusions to Italian Fascism, Jan Baťa was short of publicly proclaiming a new man. Beginning his 1937 trip around the world in Italy, he sent letters back home to be published in the company's newspaper that praised Mussolini and his modernisation of the country. The Fascists, Baťa wrote, did not stop at building motorways, stations or factories. Most importantly they »are building the human

73 J. A. BAŤA, *Budujme stát pro 40 000 000 lidí*, Zlín 1937, pp. 6–24.

74 *Ibid.*, pp. 149–154.

75 DOLEŠAL, *In the Kingdom of Shoes*, p. 166.

76 Konference osobních referentů, 29.11.1937, SOkA Zlín, Baťa II/1, kart. 1010, i. č. 10.

77 Výběr a výchova průmyslového člověka, 1938, SOkA Zlín, Baťa II/1, i. č. 17, p. 11. For the sacralization of machines and technology in general, and counter-discourse to such sacralization, see John Carter Wood's contribution to this volume.

78 In addition to *Selection and Education of the Industrial Man*, see the short undated typescript *Education of the Industrial Man*, *Výchova průmyslového člověka*, n. d. SOkA Zlín, Baťa II/5, kart. 1192, i. č. 39, pp. 1–9.

being»<sup>79</sup>. Mussolini had been a champion of Zlín's foreign coverage for years, however neither in his letters to Zlín, his speeches, nor in *Let us Build a State* did Baťa borrow the Fascist phrase of a new man (*nový člověk*) contrary to what Doleshal claims. Instead, when referring to the Italian example Baťa simply wrote about the human being (*člověk*)<sup>80</sup>. In other texts, the company's version of the new man was generally attributed with further context and referred to as a »new industrial man«, a »new Czechoslovak man« or a »new Czech man« respectively<sup>81</sup>.

The new semantics of social engineering provided for the production of a specific, secular transcendence yet remained ambivalent in their scope. Similar to Jan Baťa's claim for a global Czechoslovakia, the concept of an industrial man created an inviolable expectation of progress, a utopian vision that was feasible if Batism was strictly being followed and that was unquestionable in the benefits it ensured for mankind. Although Jan Baťa and his human resource department did not explicitly refer to Czechoslovak utopian literature, their newly promoted internal concept of the new man built on reform capitalist ideas and an entire genre of utopian literature that had been prominent in Czechoslovakia for years<sup>82</sup>. Such role models of a male, collectivist and ethnically Czech new man reflect on the contingency of the country's political and social development and ultimately brought forward a political alternative in the moment of crisis<sup>83</sup>.

This invention of the new industrial man can be considered as the production of secular transcendence, i. e. following political theorist Hans Vorländer, the meaningful transgression of a given context in order to increase the salience of an idea, practice, object, or in this case a social order<sup>84</sup>. This act of sacralization that centred on the newly established concept of a new industrial man marked the universalisation of Batism as an ideology, a vast extension of its validity. Making the new industrial man absolute provided further legitimacy to the company's social engineering. However, unlike the concept of the *Baťovci* that was frequently invoked in public, the term »new industrial man« itself was limited to internal communication. In 1937, this semantic

79 J. A. BAŤA, V Turíně, in: Zlín, 18.01.1937, p. 1; in his travel account *For business around the world* the text was slightly changed, claiming that the Fascist »change the human being«. J. A. BAŤA, Za obchodem kolem světa, Zlín 1937, p. 38.

80 For clarification, compare DOLESHAL, In the Kingdom of Shoes, p. 165 and BAŤA, V Turíně.

81 Cf. *Výchova průmyslového člověka*, undated, SOKA Zlín, Baťa II/5, kart. 1192, i. č. 39; *Výběr a výchova průmyslového člověka*, 1938, SOKA Zlín, Baťa II/1, i. č. 17, p. 23; *Výroční zpráva. Průmyslové školy ve Zlíně. Za školní rok 1938–39*, Zlín 1939, p. 3.

82 MACHEK, *Nový člověk v českých meziválečných utopích*.

83 *Ibid.*, pp. 119–121.

84 HANS VORLAENDER, *Transzendenz und die Konstitution von Ordnungen. Eine Einführung in systematischer Ansicht*, in: Id. (ed.), *Transzendenz und die Konstitution von Ordnungen*, Berlin 2013, pp. 1–42, at p. 14.

difference between internal and public communication exposed the diverging scope of Baťa's plans: In the process of making Batism an explicit ideology, *Baťovci* in Zlín were expected to ascend to new industrial men. Jan Baťa's personal development project pursued even broader goals, presenting *Baťovci* as role models for a new Czechoslovakia. However, this plan omitted the ideological valorisation of the new industrial men. Despite all efforts of developing Batism further by adding the ritual performance, ideas of a personality cult or the language of religion the transcendent form of the company ideology remained strictly limited to Zlín and a clearly defined group of Baťa's elite employees. The new industrial man was thus a new ideal of transcendence, tangible with those individuals who could be expected – in the words of the internal guideline *Education of the industrial man* – to be already a »faithful speaker and carrier of these ideas«<sup>85</sup>.

### 5. Becoming a *Baťovec*, a New Industrial Man or a Zlíner?

How did the Baťa employees relate to rationalisation, social engineering and the new ideological claims of Jan Baťa? What aspects of Batism did they appropriate and to which extent did they self-identify as a *Baťovec*, a new industrial man or, indeed, as merely an inhabitant of Zlín? Subjectivity has been a fruitful concept for analysing the impact and dynamics of radical social engineering in the twentieth century. Amongst others, Jochen Hellbeck demonstrated how Soviet citizens were more than passive objects of social engineering, but self-consciously transformed into new men using their diaries to appropriate the Bolshevik revolution in their own lives<sup>86</sup>. In contrast to the Soviet Union, Baťa did not urge its apprentices and adult employees to keep a diary, and other requests to reflect on one's biography were limited to the application process. Nevertheless, a number of diaries and a variety of retrospective life reports, mostly written by young men after the demise of communism, reveal an ambivalent subjectification of Batism that focused on the founder Tomáš Baťa and the town Zlín, rather than any idea of the *Baťovec* let alone the new industrial man.

The experience of upward mobility and a sudden shift to modernity were central for many workers. When 14-year-old Bohuslav Harašta applied for a training position with Baťa in 1938, he was overwhelmed with the modernist

85 *Výchova průmyslového člověka*, undated, SOKA Zlín, Baťa II/5, kart. 1192, i. č. 39.

86 Jochen HELLBECK, *Revolution on my mind. Writing a diary under Stalin*, Cambridge, Mass. 2006, pp. 2–5. See also, Choi CHATTERJEE/Karen PETRONE, *Models of Selfhood and Subjectivity. The Soviet Case in Historical Perspective*, in: *Slavic Review* 67 (2008), pp. 967–986.

city, the rigorous selection process and the dynamic life in Zlín<sup>87</sup>. The boy had lost his father in his younger years, and soon after his arrival, his mother committed suicide. Looking back from the year 1991, Harašta accepted the hard and strict education at Baťa, as it was his only chance to escape the poverty of his childhood and the rough working-class quarter of Brno where he had grown up. Throughout the text, he emphasised that his time in Zlín laid the foundation for his personal development<sup>88</sup>. Harašta lost his Catholic faith in Zlín after the death of his parents, but identified the example of Tomáš Baťa as a guiding principle in his youth and throughout his life<sup>89</sup>. Speaking from the perspective of post-Socialist transformation in 1991, it was also fundamental to him that Baťa was beneficial not only for his personal life but for Zlín and all of Czechoslovakia<sup>90</sup>.

For Harašta and other authors, the cult of Tomáš Baťa was central to making sense of Zlín. Quoting the company founder was frequent throughout the ego documents under discussion here and provided legitimacy to one's accounts both in diaries and retrospective life reports<sup>91</sup>. Paul Metzger, a Swiss apprentice who wrote a diary while living and working in Zlín between June 1933 and March 1934, regularly visited Tomáš Baťa's grave outside the town to demonstrate his affiliation to the company and was eager to explain the foundations of its ideology to newcomers and guests<sup>92</sup>. Others praised the company founder as a constant source of inspiration<sup>93</sup>. The allegiance to Tomáš Baťa also created a shared sense of belonging between the young men that transcended lines of conflict. When Harašta remembered how young men from the Sudetenland left Zlín after their hometowns had been annexed by Nazi Germany in September 1938, he insisted that his former peers »were good lads and there was no difference between us, we were bound by a bond of legacy to Tomáš Bata«<sup>94</sup>. In this account, Harašta did not expose national indifference as other cases of *Baťovci* suggest but superimposed hegemonic national layers of identity with an allegiance that was universal, ever-last-

87 HARAŠTA, Učení mučení, pp. 1–6.

88 Ibid., p. 28.

89 HARAŠTA, Moje dětství a mládež na venkově, Dokumentation lebensgeschichtlicher Aufzeichnungen, Prague 1991, p. 5 and p. 8; and id., Učení mučení, p. 28.

90 Ibid., p. 28.

91 Ludvík Vaculík extensively quoted from the collection of Tomáš Baťa's speeches: Ludvík VACULÍK, Milí spolužáci! Výbor písemných prací 1939–1979, Praha 21995, pp. 150, 155, 157, 163, 166, 173 and 183. See also, Stanislav ŠTĚTKÁŘ, Internát – Baťová škola práce, SOkA Zlín AK 0/563/2, p. 8; KŘEČEK, Má dáti – dal.

92 Paul METZGER, Tagebuch, Gemeindegarchiv Möhlin, 841-143-1, pp. 89f.; id., Tagebuch. 1. Fortsetzung ab Juni 1933, Gemeindegarchiv Möhlin, 841-143-2, p. 40; id., Tagebuch. Tagebuch, Fortsetzung ab 1.1.1934–30.3.1934, Gemeindegarchiv Möhlin, 841-143-3, p. 25.

93 Cf. Stanislav ŠTĚTKÁŘ, Internát – Baťová škola práce, SOkA Zlín AK 0/563/2, X.

94 HARAŠTA, Učení mučení, p. 28.

ing and inviolable to him, i. e. the legacy of Tomáš Baťa<sup>95</sup>. His short remarks reveal functional characteristics of the transcendent, yet without a definition of what Baťa's legacy was.

Beyond Tomáš Baťa, this sense of belonging related to the performance of Batism and Zlín as the company's headquarters. Ludvík Vaculík, who was to become a well-known Czech writer and one of the speakers of the human rights movement Charter 77, joined the Baťa School of Work in 1941 and worked for six years in Zlín. During his time there, he wrote a diary and published an amended edition in 1986 and 1995<sup>96</sup>. Often critical of the School of Work, Vaculík appropriated Batism as an indicator of hard work and excellent performance. In this vein, he praised colleagues who worked through an entire night in order to finish a school project as »truly Baťa-like«<sup>97</sup>. However, the label Baťa-like included a strong reference to Zlín as a town and came to the fore when contrasted with outsiders. During the war, young men were frequently transferred between different factories and Vaculík bemoaned that the »influx of phlegmatic, sloppy boys [from another factory] spoils everything« in Zlín<sup>98</sup>. During his studies in Prague, i. e. between 1946 and 1948, Vaculík overcame his earlier criticism of Baťa in his diary and instead praised the »cultural and social life« of Zlín or even the cheap, but good coffee in Zlín's canteens<sup>99</sup>. Far away from Zlín and in a changing political context, Vaculík voiced his criticism of student life and university regulations in comparison to what he remembered as the liberating and egalitarian atmosphere of Zlín. However, he expressed his comparison in a specific modernist and rational language that others deemed arrogant<sup>100</sup>. In a Czechoslovak reality that gravitated towards the Communist takeover, Vaculík declared himself to be »tempted by the language of Bata and Batism«<sup>101</sup>.

Even for critical members of Baťa's labour force, belonging to Baťa was a question of free choice. In 1944, Vaculík penned an essay about the School of Work as a giant conveyor belt with young men in the place of shoes. In this

95 For national indifference in Zlín, see Zachary Austin DOLESHAL, National Indifference and the Transnational Corporation. The Paradigm of the Baťa Company, in: Maarten van GINDERACHTER / Jon E. FOX (eds.), National indifference and the history of nationalism in modern Europe, Abingdon 2019, pp. 81–105, and also Rogers BRUBAKER / Frederick COOPER, Beyond »Identity«, in: Theory and Society 29 (2000), pp. 1–47; Tara ZAHRA, Imagined Noncommunities. National Indifference as a Category of Analysis, in: Slavic Review 69 (2010), pp. 93–119.

96 Bohumil SVOZIL / Klára KUĐLOVÁ, Ludvík Vaculík, in: Slovník české literatury po roce 1945, URL: <<http://www.slovníkceskeliteratury.cz/showContent.jsp?docId=886>> (10-04-2022).

97 VACULÍK, Milí spolužáci! Výbor písemných prací 1939–1979, p. 275.

98 Ibid., p. 274.

99 Ibid., p. 504.

100 Ibid., p. 678.

101 Ibid., p. 551.

metaphor, everything in Zlín was mechanised, including free time activities in the dormitory. This text revealed remarkable analytical insights into the practice of social engineering and reproduced topical images of human-machine relations, but failed to find resonance among his peers. An educator called the piece a realistic description of the school, suggesting it should be published in the company newspaper. A fellow young man, similarly critical of Baťa, thought of it as an »Ode to Labour«. As his audience failed to understand the ironic, even sarcastic tone of the text, Vaculík put his criticism into question. He conceded that the essay »sounded biased, I think, yes, unfair, because I know that anyone who does not want to, does not need to become addicted to Zlín and become a product, one in thousand«<sup>102</sup>. In other words, Batism was consuming its people but of their free will – a narrative that also appeared in other diaries and life reports<sup>103</sup>. Baťa subjectivity rendered Batism as an ideology of consent, a style of life people in Zlín chose and followed religiously.

In rare cases, the allegiance to Batism allowed for a critique of the Baťa system or underpinned even deviant behaviour. In 1934, Antonin Vavra, a young man who had successfully worked for Baťa for four years, was sacked for insubordination. Vavra had been punished for ill-discipline but had to leave the company only after he had refused to write an essay on what it meant to be a *Baťovec*. Claiming »I am a Baťovec, but I am not going to write this because it is stupid (*blbost*)«<sup>104</sup>, he demonstrated his appropriation of Batism but also alarmed the personnel department. In 1942, Vlastimíl Chrz, a friend of Vaculík, challenged the rule of educators in the School of Work even more. As a spokesman for his group of young men, Chrz expressed dissatisfaction with the curriculum and demanded the »reform of cultural education« and »social improvement in our factories«. To the astonishment and fury of his superiors, Chrz based his claims on his extensive knowledge of Tomáš Baťa's writings, quoted the company founder when possible and asserted that since the founder's death in 1932 no progress had been made in Zlín<sup>105</sup>. For the company, such a deviant subjectification seemed impossible and the school consulted with a psychiatrist who diagnosed Chrz with a »nervous indisposition – nervous excitement« and institutionalised him<sup>106</sup>. Both cases of *Eigen-Sinn* expose the extent to which Baťa presupposed conformity and

102 VACULÍK, Milí spolužáci! Výbor písemných prací 1939–1979, p. 177.

103 HARAŠTA, Učení mučení, p. 17.

104 DOLEŠAL, In the Kingdom of Shoes, p. 156. SokA Zlín, Baťa II/2, kart. 1095, i. č. 57, č. 7, p. 1.

105 Letter to Václav Chrz, 20.07.1942, SokA Zlín, Baťa II/2 neinn. kart. 265, 21; Posudek o ml. muži, 22.09.1942, *ibid.*, 22.

106 Letter to Václav Chrz 04.09.1942, *ibid.*, 19.



failed to allow for criticism or even comprehend it<sup>107</sup>. The devaluation of internal ideological critique as mental illness was the most radical form of excluding not only people, but also ideas and resembled a practice that the Soviet Union followed in the 1950s to suppress dissidents and that built upon their becoming Soviet subjects<sup>108</sup>.

Baťa employees felt a strong ideological link to Batism, both during their time in Zlín and in retrospect, but this was not necessarily expressed as being a *Baťovec*. In different accounts, it remains open what the adoption of social engineering by the company actually meant for its employees. While belonging to Baťa was rooted in Zlín as a town and the company as a community of like-minded individuals, being a *Baťovec* and acting Baťa-like was to be demonstrated in everyday situations. Only the cult of the deceased company founder revealed a wider transcendence that individual Baťa men could adhere to. Among the authors of diaries and life reports who had mostly worked at Baťa during the Second World War, Tomáš Baťa was a clear object of veneration but not the living boss during this time, Jan Baťa's. Even more so, the authors did not refer in any case to the semantics of a new industrial man. They were rather Zlíner and *Baťovci* than anything else. This evaluation of subjectivity leads to the ideological ruptures that Baťa and Zlín faced after 1938.

## 6. Beyond Regimes? Batism after 1939

Just one year after Jan Baťa had announced his utopian plans for Czechoslovakia in 1937, the country was engulfed in Europe-wide political crisis. After another year, it had ceased to exist. When on 15 March 1939 the German Wehrmacht occupied the remainder of Bohemia and Moravia, Zlín became part of the so-called »Protectorate«, a dependent non-state partially incorporated into the German Reich. In a dramatically changing political and societal context between 1938 and 1948, Baťa's social engineering continued to function and created an ideologically based sense of belonging to Zlín, as the manifold examples from that period in the previous section highlight. However, the attempts at making rationalisation an ideology and sacralizing the company founder came to an end and central aspects of the ideology proved incompatible with National Socialism and later on with Communism. Analysing Batism in confrontation with these political ideologies

107 Cf. Alf LUEDTKE, *Eigen-Sinn. Fabrikalltag, Arbeitererfahrungen und Politik vom Kaiserreich bis in den Faschismus*, Hamburg 1993.

108 Cf. Robert van VOREN, *Political Abuse of Psychiatry – an Historical Overview*, in: *Schizophrenia Bulletin* 1 (2010), pp. 33–35, see also: Michel FOUCAULT, *History of madness*, London 2006.

thus showcases that it was the cult of Tomáš Baťa that stood out in a social experiment that showcased the large extent of family resemblance in social engineering across Europe in the first half of the twentieth century<sup>109</sup>.

For the Nazi economy, Baťa was a role model of efficient and innovative production. After the occupation, Germany absorbed the highly industrialised Czech lands into its mixed, free and planned economy. Unlike other big corporations in the Protectorate, Baťa remained a mostly Czech company and only co-opted one German director in the summer of 1940<sup>110</sup>. Throughout the war, German experts travelled to Zlín to familiarise themselves with the organisation of production and reported enthusiastically about the spirit of workers. To them, it seemed, Baťa fulfilled the ideal of a Nazi *Betriebsgemeinschaft*, a hierarchical, yet harmonic industrial community in the factory bonded by ideology – a small element of *Volksgemeinschaft*, i. e. the community of the ethnic and racial Germans<sup>111</sup>. In November 1943, a chief officer in the German ministry of armaments and war production visited Zlín and wanted »to discuss to which extent German corporations could be retrained at Baťa to use the more rationalised methods of work«. As mentioned in the introduction to this chapter, the officer could present his plans to Hitler himself who simply replied: »Baťa is known to me. That is nothing other than practical National Socialism«<sup>112</sup>.

Such approval was volatile and within days, Hitler's office denied the quote insisting that Hitler had not endorsed Baťa<sup>113</sup>. Regardless of what Hitler did say, the dispute around his quote reveals the potentials of sacrality around

109 For this family resemblance of social engineering, see Wolfgang SCHIVELBUSCH, *Three new deals. Reflections on Roosevelt's America, Mussolini's Italy, and Hitler's Germany, 1933–1939*, New York 2006; Kiran Klaus PATEL, *The New Deal. A Global History*, Princeton 2016.

110 Jaromír BALCAR, *Panzer für Hitler – Traktoren für Stalin. Großunternehmen in Böhmen und Mähren, 1938–1950*, München 2014, pp. 66f.; Jaroslav POSPÍŠIL et al., *Herr Direktor a ti druzí. Albrecht Miesbach, protektorátní ředitel Baťových závodů, Zlín 2015*, pp. 122–127.

111 For *Betriebsgemeinschaft* and *Volksgemeinschaft*, see Martina STEBER/Bernhard GOTTO, *Volksgemeinschaft. Writing the Social History of the Nazi Regime*, in: Id. (ed.), *Visions of Community in Nazi Germany. Social Engineering and Private Lives*, Oxford 2014, pp. 1–26; Michael WILDT, *Volksgemeinschaft. A Modern Perspective on National Socialist Society*, in: STEBER/GOTTO (eds.), *Visions of community in Nazi Germany*, pp. 43–59; Torben MOEBIUS/Sören EDEN, *Der Ort der »Betriebsgemeinschaft« in der deutschen Gesellschaft 1933–1945. Neue Perspektiven auf die nationalsozialistische »Ordnung der Arbeit«*, in: Frank BECKER/Daniel SCHMIDT (eds.), *Industrielle Arbeitswelt und Nationalsozialismus. Der Betrieb als Laboratorium der »Volksgemeinschaft« 1920–1960*, Essen 2020, pp. 28–60.

112 Deutsches Staatsministerium für Böhmen und Mähren to Heinrich Himmler, 18.12.1943, Národní Archiv [NA] Praha, Německé státní ministerstvo pro Čechy a Moravu, Praha, inv. č. 1080, sig. 110-11/18, kart. 88, p. 20.

113 Note, 25.02.1944, NA Praha, Německé státní ministerstvo pro Čechy a Moravu, Praha, inv. č. 1080, sig. 110-11/18, kart. 88, p. 19.

Tomáš Baťa and the Nazi urge to desacralize his legacy. The dismissive Nazi reactions were highly ambivalent as any transfer of ideas from a Czech factory to German workers in the Reich confronted the ordering capacity of »race«. The protectorate's minister of economy explained that such a quote, even more when attributed to Hitler, might empower Czech nationalism and its propaganda. Given that Tomáš Baťa had introduced rationalised production during the First World War, Czechs might even claim that »Baťa was the first Nazi«<sup>114</sup>. Yet, when the original plan of sending German workers to special training courses came into being in November 1944, i. e. after the bombing of Zlín and factory and toward the end of the war, it was exactly the transfer of »ideas and the entire nature of work discipline and production methods« that should contribute to the German war effort<sup>115</sup>.

After the liberation of Czechoslovakia, the new Czechoslovak state and particularly the Communist Party (KŠC) distinguished between Batism as a method and an ideology in an even harsher way. The factory in Zlín and the entire company were nationalised in 1946, the majority of managers was forced to leave Baťa, and Dominik Čipera, the leading director during the Nazi occupation and mayor of Zlín since 1932, was put on trial for collaboration<sup>116</sup>. Yet, Batism also provided inspiration. In 1946, Antonín Zápotocký leading member of the KŠC and soon-to-be prime minister and president of Communist Czechoslovakia explained:

Baťa was a private capitalist entrepreneur [...] but we would be stupid, foolish and incorrigible if we wanted to believe that everything Bata did was wrong and that we must reject it, write it down and throw it away. No, comrades, friends, we can and will learn a lot from Bata about how to organise modern production<sup>117</sup>.

In this vein, the new authorities developed a model of self-management in Zlín based on Baťa's previous organisation and employed the new model also in other nationalised corporations<sup>118</sup>.

114 Deutsches Staatsministerium für Böhmen und Mähren to Heinrich Himmler, 18.12.1943, NA Praha Německé státní ministerstvo pro Čechy a Moravu, Praha, inv. č. 1080, sig. 110-11/18, kart. 88, p. 20.

115 Letter to Parteiverbindungsstelle Prague, 05.11.1944, NA Prague, Německé státní ministerstvo pro Čechy a Moravu, Praha, inv. č. 596, sig. 110-4/444, kart. 40, p. 5.

116 Zdeněk POKLUĐA, *Baťovi muži*, Zlín 2012, pp. 52–57.

117 Přemysl ROUŠAR, *Dějiny národního podniku Svit. 1. díl, Nár. podnik Baťa (1945–1948)*, Praha 1967, p. 165.

118 POKLUĐA, *Baťovi muži*, p. 142. See: Stanislav KŘEČEK, *Organisace podnikové samosprávy. 1. část, Organisace a evidence zásob (skladní účetnictví)*, Praha 1947; Stanislav KŘEČEK, *Organisace podnikové samosprávy. II. část, Mzdové účetnictví (organisace mzdové kanceláře, účtování mezd, služného a sociálního pojistného)*, Praha 1947.

After the Communist takeover of February 1948, the Czechoslovak Communists symbolically unmade Batism. Constructing a new national statehood under Soviet hegemony, the Communists struggled for national legitimacy and savaged the democratic First Republic<sup>119</sup>. As part of the Socialist reconfiguration of pre-war symbols, in November 1948, the town of Zlín was renamed Gottwaldov in honour of the leader of the KSČ and first Communist state president Klement Gottwald. In addition, the nationalised corporation was renamed *Svit* (glare)<sup>120</sup>. Three years after liberation, state and party attempted to erase any memory of the capitalist history of Baťa, its founder or his successor. While the name Gottwaldov followed the well-rehearsed Stalinist personality cult, *Svit* referred to a former Baťa-subsidary, the Slovak viscose factories (*Slovenské vizkózové továrne*)<sup>121</sup>. Both names lasted until 1989.

In the 1950s and 1960s, Communist Czechoslovakia aimed to finalise the desacralization of the company and its founder. Denouncing Batism as a form of »social fascism«, i. e., a combination of Social Democratic demands with bourgeois and capitalist traits leaning towards Fascism, Marxist historians pictured Baťa as the primary antagonist of revolutionary Socialism in Czechoslovakia<sup>122</sup>. In their attacks on Baťa, the Communists even avoided the term *Baťovec* as it »evoked the image of a humble toiler confused by Baťa's sophisticated propaganda«<sup>123</sup>. Instead, they coined a Baťa employee *Baťovak*, a term that stemmed from the interwar Communist critique of Baťa and resonated

119 Bradley F. ABRAMS, *The Struggle for the Soul of the Nation. Czech Culture and the Rise of Communism*, Lanham, Md. 2005, pp. 120–125; Jan C. BEHREND, »Heben wir einen neuen Staat als den Ausdruck einer neuen Ordnung aus der Taufe«. Zur Legitimation von Staatlichkeit in Polen, der Tschechoslowakei und der SBZ/DDR (1943–1952), in: Jana OSTERKAMP/Joachim von PUTTKAMER (eds.), *Sozialistische Staatlichkeit*, München 2012, pp. 45–72, at pp. 66f.

120 Vyhláška ministerstva č. 22/1949 Sb. vnitřní o změnách úředních názvů míst v roce 1948 1949; Vyhláška ministra průmyslu ze dne 24. prosince 1948 č. 3418/1948 Ú. l., o změně znění firmy Baťa, národního podniku, ve znění pozdějších předpisů 1948; JEMELKA / SEVEČEK, *Tovární města Baťova koncernu*, pp. 102f.

121 See: Jan PLAMPER, *The Stalin Cult. A Study in the Alchemy of Power*, New Haven 2012, pp. 92–95; Frank DIKÖETTER, *Dictators. The Cult of Personality in the Twentieth Century*, London 2020, pp. 78f.; for *Svit*, see JEMELKA / SEVEČEK, *Tovární města Baťova koncernu*, pp. 202–232.

122 Bohumil KUČERA, *Batismus – ideologie sociálfašismu, Gottwaldov 1959*, pp. 62–66; Eva DVOŘÁKOVÁ, *Batismus a Baťovci, Gottwaldov 1960*, pp. 9–11. For an introduction into the concept of social fascism see, Lea HARO, *Entering a Theoretical Void. The Theory of Social Fascism and Stalinism in the German Communist Party*, in: *Critique* 4 (2011), pp. 563–582.

123 *Svit*, 03.04.1959, quoted after Jitka GLABAZŇOVÁ, *Fenomén Baťa v dobovém gottwaldovském tisku v letech 1958–1968*. Unpublished M.A. thesis, Masaryk University Brno, p. 43, URL: <[https://is.muni.cz/th/kb3bv/Diplomova\\_prace\\_GLABAZNOVA.pdf](https://is.muni.cz/th/kb3bv/Diplomova_prace_GLABAZNOVA.pdf)> (10-04-2022).

with the Czech word *vojak* (soldier)<sup>124</sup>. In the early years of Communism, former Baťa employees faced a new project of social engineering and were bound to become »new socialist man«<sup>125</sup>. Alongside portraits of Gottwald himself, the Gottwaldov May Day parade presented a different, hard-working and effective pioneer of labour, the Stalinist *úderník*. Modelled after the Stakhanovite movement in the Soviet Union and introduced in 1945, these elite workers symbolically contributed to the reconstruction of Czechoslovak economy by surpassing their quotas<sup>126</sup>. However, the fact that after 1989, Baťa nostalgia resurfaced widely in Zlín and former employees came out to pronounce their *Baťovec* identity raises doubts about the extent to which this *damnatio memoriae* was successful.

## 7. Conclusion: Ideology and Sacralization in the Town of Shoes

In Zlín, industrial rationalisation and the organised improvement of employees were formed into an ideology that underpinned the sovereignty of the shoe company Baťa in the town. After the First World War, company founder Tomáš Baťa, his leading managers and the company's organisation manufactured a system of beliefs that centred on industrial rationalisation and the narrative of individual upward social mobility. After the death of Tomáš Baťa, the second boss Jan Baťa rendered specific aspects of this ideology absolute, inviolable and meaningful and in other words, as sacred. It was particularly the cult of personality around the company founder Tomáš Baťa that showed traits of sacralization. However, this secular transcendence remained limited in its reach with regards to space, time and followers and, most importantly, extent to which the different layers of Baťa's ideology were made sacred.

Baťa's construction of secular transcendence implicitly built on the shared transnational discourse of rationalisation and modernity and elevated it to a guiding and universal episteme of societal renewal and improvement.

<sup>124</sup> Ibid.

<sup>125</sup> NEČASOVÁ, *Nový socialistický člověk*, pp. 27–34 and pp. 229–237. For an analysis of the new man's subjectivity under Czechoslovak Communism, see Sebastian LAMBERTZ, *The People's Own Media. Workers Representation in Czechoslovak Socialist Television*, in: *European History Yearbook 21* (2020), pp. 87–105.

<sup>126</sup> Lewis H. SIEGELBAUM, *Stakhanovism and the Politics of Productivity in the USSR, 1935–1941*, Cambridge 1990; Peter HEUMOS, *State Socialism, Egalitarianism, Collectivism. On the Social Context of Socialist Work Movements in Czechoslovak Industrial and Mining Enterprises, 1945–1965*, in: *International Labor and Working-Class History 68* (2005), pp. 47–74, pp. 47–52; Christiane BRENNER/Peter HEUMOS, *Eine Heldentypologie der Tschechoslowakei. Zur Einführung*, in: Silke SATJUKOW/Rainer GRIES (ed.), *Sozialistische Helden. Eine Kulturgeschichte der Propagandafiguren in Osteuropa und der DDR*, Berlin 2002, pp. 235–243.

Making use of scientific expertise and American models of industrial organisation and standardisation, the ideology of Batism claimed that a society could be forged just like industrial products<sup>127</sup>. In fact, the company attempted to engineer its employees with wide-ranging interventions into their private lives and the rigorous exclusion of all those from the town of Zlín who were deemed disruptive to the social order instituted by the company. This system of beliefs laid the foundation for further ideologisation in Zlín, yet it remained outside the general debate of the time.

In contrast, the cult of Tomáš Baťa constitutes a local form of sacralization. The cult of personality exerted »normative claims over the meanings of life« and provided a guideline for employees to conduct themselves<sup>128</sup>. Therefore, the Baťa cult amplified the ambivalent belief in rationalisation with the authority of the deceased benefactor of Zlín and thus became the very aspect of Batism standing out from industrial projects of industrial modernity in general. Therefore, it was also this cult that failed to transfer into other ideological contexts such as National Socialism or Communism.

The new man of Batism, moreover, was imbued with sacrality only during a short period of time and within documents of internal ideological renewal. While this ideal employee was imagined as both the prototypical product of social engineering and the faithful believer of Tomáš Baťa it was not until the year 1937 that earlier role models such as the pioneer or *Batovec* were labelled as a »new man« of some sort. Despite all efforts of developing Batism further as an ideology this short-lived elevation of the ideal employee remained strictly limited to Zlín and a small group of Baťa's managerial elite, i. e. those who firmly believed in the sense of Batism themselves could be qualified as new men.

Practices of sacralization in the town of shoes aimed at creating political and a social order and legitimise the position of the company and its leading managers in Zlín. In a longer perspective between 1919 and 1948, Batism was a forceful and functional ideology that put profit over people and also over beliefs. Baťa and Batism aimed at increasing production and utilised social engineering, cultish veneration and the public display of its model to generate economic growth. Against this background, the years 1937 and 1938 appear as an ideological aberration stemming from the short-term political ambitions of Jan Baťa<sup>129</sup>. Implicitly building an ideology on rationalisation and modernity and the explicit sacralization of Tomáš Baťa both served to strengthen the company's strict control over Zlín, its inhabitants and the employees of the shoe company and to underpin a consensual political order

127 CEKOTA, Zlín, p. 38.

128 LYNCH, *The Sacred in the Modern World*, p. 47.

129 DOLESHAL, *In the Kingdom of Shoes*, p. 166.

in the restricted space of the company town. The sacralization of Tomáš Baťa constructed a continuity of modernisation and growth in Zlín, provided both the company and his successor Jan Baťa with legitimacy beyond his death and laid the foundation for a specific sense of belonging to Zlín and Baťa<sup>130</sup>.

130 VORLAENDER, *Transzendenz und die Konstitution von Ordnungen*, pp. 37–42.





John Carter Wood

## »The Rightful Purpose of Things«

The World Council of Churches and the  
Technological Society, 1937–1948

### 1. Introduction

Mid-twentieth-century Christian intellectual analyses of the rapidly increasing technologisation of the modern world expressed fears about the sacralization of secular concepts and formulated the aim of resacralizing Christian visions of the sacred. Understanding Christian attitudes to technology contributes to historians' growing interest in Christian views of, and attempts to shape, modernity generally<sup>1</sup>. The mid-twentieth century was an urgent phase in Christian thinking on technology, which saw the articulation of still-relevant approaches and concepts. The intensity of the Christian engagement with technology – and, more specifically, with the *technological society* – was driven by the rise of totalitarianism, by a global war in which new kinds of weapons and communications equipment played central roles and by the urgent questions of post-war rebuilding. Christians were, of course, not alone in responding to these issues; however, while their analyses drew on and participated in a highly »secular« public sphere, they also introduced distinctive ideas.

The continuous debates about technology and social change across the past century are clearly of historical interest. Christians have not usually been dominant players in such debates; however, recent historiography suggesting secularization in Western Europe was less a long, gradual process and more

1 See, e.g., James CHAPPEL, *Catholic Modern. The Challenge of Totalitarianism and the Remaking of the Church*, Cambridge, MA 2018; Rajesh HEYNICKX / Stéphane SYMONS (eds.), *So What's New about Scholasticism? How Neo-Thomism Helped Shape the Twentieth Century*, Berlin 2018; Alan JACOBS, *The Year of Our Lord 1943. Christian Humanism in an Age of Crisis*, New York 2018; Sam BREWITT-TAYLOR, *Christian Radicalism in the Church of England and the Invention of the British Sixties, 1957–1970. The Hope of a World Transformed*, Oxford 2018; John Carter WOOD, *This Is Your Hour. Christian Intellectuals in Britain and the Crisis of Europe, 1937–1949*, Manchester 2019; id., Introduction: Christian Modernities in Britain and Ireland in the Twentieth Century, in: *Contemporary British History* 34 (2020), pp. 495–509.

a sudden phenomenon beginning in the late 1960s<sup>2</sup> calls for a reconsideration of the importance of religion before the »decline of Christendom«<sup>3</sup> set in.

There was no single »Christian« view of technology (although individual commentators sometimes spoke as if this were the case). Even limiting ourselves to »intellectuals«<sup>4</sup>, we find both »optimistic« evaluations of technology's potential to increase human well-being and »pessimistic« warnings of its dangers. Many Christian intellectuals' diagnoses of the »crises« around them – though expressed in diverse terms – centred on what they perceived to be processes of sacralization and desacralization: examining these narratives through the conceptual lenses offered by this volume enables us to more clearly structure and understand such thinking and to link it to other interpretations of technologised modernity.

Gordon Lynch has succinctly described »the sacred« as »what people collectively experience as absolute, non-contingent realities which present normative claims over the meanings and conduct of social life«<sup>5</sup>. It represents more than simply what an individual or a group thinks of as important: sacredness requires the attribution of a »radical otherness« that poses a seemingly unquestionable moral duty<sup>6</sup>. Definitions of the sacred also identify that which threatens it, »the profane«, and through profanation »the pollution of this sacred reality is experienced by its adherents as a painful wound for which some form of restitution is necessary«<sup>7</sup>. These sacred realities can take many forms and have diverse dimensions. In the case study presented here, an alleged »spiritual« crisis in the modern age was explained as the desacralization of a sacred *Christian* framework for understanding reality – one that was, in Lynch's terms, perceived by adherents as both »absolute« and »non-contingent« – and the concurrent sacralization of competing (and often technologically enhanced) *secular* concepts. The twentieth-century sacralizations of political ideals and ideologies pushed forward trends that had coalesced starting in the late 18th century, centring on the increasing replacement of

2 See, for example, Callum BROWN, *The Death of Christian Britain. Understanding Secularisation 1800–2000*, London 2009; Hugh McLEOD, *The Religious Crisis of the 1960s*, Oxford 2007; David HEMPTON/Hugh McLEOD (eds.), *Secularization and Religious Innovation in the North Atlantic World*, Oxford 2017; Clive D. FIELD, *Secularization in the Long 1960s. Numerating Religion in Britain*, Oxford 2017; Clive D. FIELD, *Periodizing Secularization. Religious Allegiance and Attendance in Britain, 1880–1945*, Oxford 2019.

3 Hugh McLEOD/Werner USTORF (eds.), *The Decline of Christendom in Western Europe, 1750–2000*, Cambridge 2003.

4 My definition of »intellectuals« follows that presented in Stefan COLLINI, *Absent Minds. Intellectuals in Britain*, Oxford 2006, pp. 52–59.

5 Gordon LYNCH, *The Sacred in the Modern World: A Cultural Sociological Approach*, New York 2012, p. 29.

6 Id., *On the Sacred*, Durham 2012, pp. 25f.

7 LYNCH, *The Sacred in the Modern World*, p. 29.

religious ideals with those derived from worldly and explicitly human-centred contexts<sup>8</sup>. For the religiously minded, the latter were perceived as a profanation of the former, as »false gods« worshipped by a world that had lost the »true«, Christian faith. In response it was argued that Christian »ultimate beliefs« had to be *resacralized* in a form appropriate to changed modern conditions.

These conditions were unmistakably shaped by advances in technology. Technology is a broad term, and the theology of technology has been an active field of enquiry for decades<sup>9</sup>. There have been several historical studies of Christian views of particular kinds of technology, whether birth-control pills or atomic bombs<sup>10</sup>, but I will focus here on a more general analysis of technological change as such. Given the breadth of this topic, it is necessary to specify the networks and narratives being analysed. I will consider the international ecumenical organisation the World Council of Churches (WCC), particularly two international conferences organised within its contexts: one in Oxford in 1937, at which the formation of the WCC was initiated, and one in Amsterdam in 1948, at which the organisation was inaugurated. The WCC's views on social questions were not necessarily typical of Christians generally: they were likely more ecumenical, international, institutional and intellectual. Even *within* the WCC there were differences of opinion about technology and modernity, some of which were visible in conference reports and some of which were simply papered over. The breadth of opinion was significant, and both »optimistic« and »pessimistic« views are apparent. The reports of the two conferences thus enable outlining key aspects of what I refer to as the »intellectual strategies« through which prominent Christians navigated issues related to technology and culture in the mid-twentieth century.

With »intellectual strategies«, I refer primarily to the ways historical actors have *thought through* specific issues that have faced them. In order to address the relationship between faith and technologised modernity, the ecumenical activists in the WCC invested significant energy in considering both. As committed Christians, they were convinced that the sacred truths of their

8 Hans VORLAENDER, *Demokratie und Transzendenz: Politische Ordnungen zwischen Autonomiebehauptung und Unverfügbarkeitspraktiken*, in: Id. (ed.), *Demokratie und Transzendenz*, Bielefeld 2013, pp. 11–38, at p. 16.

9 See, for example Carl MITCHAM (ed.), *Theology and Technology. Essays in Christian Analysis and Exegesis*, Lanham 1984; Thomas Sieger DERR, *Conversations about Ultimate Matters. Theological Motifs in Ecumenical Studies of the Technological Future*, in: *International Review of Mission* 66 (1977), pp. 123–134; Brent WATERS, *Christian Moral Theology in the Emerging Technoculture. From Posthuman Back to Human*, Farnham 2014.

10 Alana HARRIS, *The Schism of '68. Catholicism, Contraception and Humanae Vitae in Europe, 1945–1975*, Cham 2018; Jonathan GORRY, *Cold War Christians and the Spectre of Nuclear Deterrence. 1945–1959*, Basingstoke 2013.

faith were of timeless validity: these truths included principles for the correct ordering of the social relationships among people and between people and God. These religiously inspired intellectuals were, however, confronted by a radically new, rapidly transforming modern social reality. While relating faith to society was hardly a new challenge – the issue has accompanied Christian thought from its earliest days – many Christian observers believed it was being posed in historically unprecedented ways in the mid-twentieth century. The reason for this had much to do with technological progress and the powers that it granted to large institutions and movements. Christian thinkers were, thus, confronted with a precise set of problems that appeared to arise out of specific historical developments; they believed the resulting crisis could only be effectively met through an appeal to timeless, transcendent Christian principles. This much was, within the WCC context, largely consensus. However, various specific approaches and answers to these problems were possible, and thus different Christians came up with different ways of »resolving« them on an intellectual level, i. e. working out arguments for how faith and the modern social order *should* relate to one another. The ideas they developed were complex and contingent, reflecting the specificities of these actors' outlooks, experiences, aims and understandings both of faith and the social order. While mainly referring to the realm of ideas, however, »intellectual strategies« also encompass efforts to promote and, if possible, *implement* the solutions that had been reached. Ideas – even in the relatively rarefied intellectual contexts considered here – were developed not in the abstract but rather with the aim of solving particular problems in particular ways. In analysing these strategies, a number of questions are important: How were the key problems to be solved defined? What terminology did the Christian intellectuals in the contexts considered here employ to address them, and what concepts did they develop in response? What active responses did they see as possible?

## 2. Empirical context

Establishing the institutional and intellectual context of the »ecumenical movement« and its two key conferences immediately before and after the Second World War will seem to lead us away from the topic of technology: both of these conferences, particularly that in Oxford, were focused on the topic of »totalitarianism«, which preoccupied the ecumenical movement in the 1930s and 1940s. However, as I will show, Christian attitudes towards *technology* were crucially shaped by the ecumenical *anti-totalitarian* critique; indeed, many of the fears of totalitarianism expressed prior to the war were redirected afterwards towards technology itself, whether in totalitarian or democratic societies.

While »the ecumenical movement« did in fact represent a broad range of international faith communities, it was dominated for much of the 20th century by Protestants. Only from the mid-1960s onward did the Vatican agree to official Roman Catholic participation in ecumenical activities. (A small number of individual Catholics, however, did participate in WCC conferences and contributed to conference reports.) The cooperation from the Orthodox churches was often hindered by the Soviet regime (many of the Orthodox contributors in the interwar period did so from exile in the West) and then the Soviet domination of eastern Europe after the Second World War. Thus, for the period under consideration here, organised »ecumenism« was dominated by various shades of Protestant thinking, and, for obvious geopolitical reasons, British and American Churches played a disproportionate role. But with these limitations in mind, there is probably no other institutionalised Christian network from the 1930s onward with a comparable cross-denominational and global reach, touching on all settled continents and with the support of – with the exceptions noted – the institutional leaderships of many of the world’s largest churches.

Growing out of diverse strains of missionary work and interfaith dialogue, this movement had taken a decisive step towards formation at the 1910 International Missionary Conference in Edinburgh. From the small group who arranged subsequent conferences there grew a stable organisational core across the 1920s that organised various streams of thought, discussion and activity<sup>11</sup>. By the mid 1930s, this network had developed substantially, and the decision was taken to establish a new consolidated ecumenical organisation with the aim of increasing Christian influence in a world order that appeared headed for a terminal crisis. At conferences in Oxford and in Edinburgh in 1937 the diverse agencies of organised ecumenism took the formal decision to form the WCC<sup>12</sup>. Delayed by war, the inaugural conference in Amsterdam could only take place eleven years later, in 1948. I will, for simplicity, refer simply to »the WCC«, also at times when the organisation was still in the process of formation.

Both WCC conferences produced extensive reports, consisting of individually authored essays summarising positions taken through a process of discussion and revision by working groups. There were eight volumes of reports

11 For general and institutional outlines of the ecumenical movement, see Ruth ROUSE / Stephen Charles NEILL (eds.), *A History of the Ecumenical Movement, 1517–1948*, London 1954; David CARTER, *The Ecumenical Movement in Its Early Years*, in: *The Journal of Ecclesiastical History* 49 (1998), pp. 465–485; Keith CLEMENTS, *Faith on the Frontier. A Life of J.H. Oldham*, Edinburgh 1999; Kenneth C. BARNES, *Nazism, Liberalism, & Christianity. Protestant Social Thought in Germany & Great Britain, 1925–1937*, Lexington 1991, pp. 93–133.

12 For an overview of the Oxford 1937 conference, see Graeme SMITH, *Oxford 1937. The Universal Christian Council for Life and Work Conference*, Frankfurt a. M. 2004.

from what I will refer to as »Oxford 1937« and five for »Amsterdam 1948«. Some of the period's most prominent Christian thinkers, both churchmen and laypeople, were represented among conference participants and report writers. »Oxford 1937« focused on the rise of totalitarian regimes and the perception that totalitarian tendencies were advancing even in still-democratic nations. Indeed, the liberal democratic societies of the early 20th century were believed to have failed and some new alternative to them was allegedly required. The tenor of the conference's publications was clearly anti-totalitarian; however, the necessity of trying to keep the door open to delegations from countries ruled by Fascist, National Socialist or Communist regimes meant that direct criticisms were, at times, muted, even if the underlying message repudiating, for example, the persecution of Jews or the oppression of minorities were made clear enough. The defence of liberal democracy in these pages was often couched in a variety of trenchant critiques of its alleged tendencies toward »atomisation« and »secularism«.

The context of 1948 was different. Democratic liberalism had defeated Fascism and National Socialism (though in alliance with Communism, and right-wing authoritarian governments continued to exist in Europe and beyond). Soviet totalitarianism, of course, continued, and by the time the delegates gathered in Amsterdam in 1948 there was already an emergent Soviet dominance in the east. For most Christians, the officially atheist tyrannies of the Soviet sphere were anathema; however, the WCC sought to tread lightly. First, its organisers wanted to avoid giving Communist authorities excuses to ban the participation of Christians from their states. Second (and in part for similar reasons), the WCC sought to avoid being perceived as a tool of »the West« against »the East«, making the carving out of an independent position between the two blocs a recurrent priority. Third, a minority of Christian thinkers within ecumenical circles were sympathetic towards, or even advocates of, Communism, claiming it represented a commitment to »social justice« that the capitalist West lacked. Overall, however, with regard to the influence of technology attention turned to characteristics of »modern« economic and social life that were common to both East and West. Before considering, in turn, the discussion of technology at Oxford and Amsterdam, I will first briefly summarise some of the common themes that shaped both conferences' engagement with the topic of technology and lay out how these topics can be seen in light of the framework of sacralization and desacralization.

### 3. Technology, totalitarianism and the sacred

In the discussions at Oxford 1937 and Amsterdam 1948, how was technology viewed in relation to the wider crises that both conferences perceived? How were narratives of sacralization, desacralization and resacralization applied either to technology *itself* or to other things that were seen as being transformed by it? After briefly examining these questions, I will consider the specific discussions that took place at each conference.

#### 3.1 Stating the problem: desacralization and (competing) sacralizations

WCC analyses critiqued the rise to dominance in the modern period of ideas that were destructive of »true« or »genuine« forms of human social life. The root cause of modern catastrophes was seen to lie in a decline in the salience and impact of Christian beliefs: »ultimate« Christian principles that had formerly been widely accepted as the basis of social life had faded. While such analyses were usually offered in terms of »secularisation«, their understanding of this process clearly postulated a *desacralization* of Christian principles and a concurrent *sacralization* of competing sets of beliefs that were taken to be »ultimate« sources of meaning, providing the basis of social and cultural orders. The Christian sacred, in this view, had declined, while nationalist, ideological or technological sacreds were rising to take its place.

The perspective of the WCC, then, focused on the rise of »man-centred« social orders that were seen as fundamentally dangerous. Secularisation meant, it was argued, that genuine religion had been replaced by »secular faiths« and »pseudo religions« in which only human criteria and definitions of life's meaning were valued. While the manifold shortcomings of earlier »Christian« societies were acknowledged, the utter loss of a Christian underpinning for the modern cultural order was seen as distinctive and dangerous. The only viable solution, it was argued, was to return »genuine« religion to its »ultimate« place in Western life, providing a new »spiritual centre« around which a healthier social order could (re-)emerge. This combination of diagnosis and proposed cure was common to both WCC gatherings, though with differences in argumentation, emphasis and content, as the following examinations of Oxford and Amsterdam show.

## 3.2 Oxford 1937

The Oxford Conference on »Church, Community and State« took place in a context of increasing crisis and fears of war. The general introduction printed in all Oxford conference reports warned that non-Christian »common assumptions«, »ultimate beliefs« and convictions about the »ends of life« were being raised to an unquestionable, order-defining status by powerful states. J.H. Oldham, a prominent British ecumenist and one of the conference's co-organisers, argued that the key issue revolved around »those common assumptions regarding the meaning of life without which, in some form, no society can cohere«. In many countries, versions of an »all-powerful state« were

seeking to organize the whole of life in accordance with a particular doctrine of the end of man's existence, and in an all-embracing community life which claims to be at once the source and the goal of all human activities: a state, that is to say, which aims at being also a church<sup>13</sup>.

This sacralization of the state was, Oldham argued, »one of the major turning-points in history«: through a process of desacralization, the »basal assumptions« that »have hitherto given a meaning to life, and unity and stability to civilization« have »lost their unquestioned validity«<sup>14</sup>. Oldham's notions set the tone for the Oxford conference, which depicted the contemporary crisis as historically unprecedented. In the view of Yale theologian Kenneth Latourette, the modern age was defined by a profound loss of contact with the Christian sacred: »For the first time in human history«, he wrote, »multitudes have been born, grown to manhood, and died without having even a formal connection with what is usually termed religion«<sup>15</sup>. The West, Oldham argued in the conference's concluding remarks, was experiencing conflicts over sacred values<sup>16</sup>. The »crisis in men's ultimate beliefs« (in essence, a »crisis of *faith*«) had eroded the »cement which holds society together«, namely: »the general acceptance of certain common assumptions, expressed or implied, in its

13 J. H. OLDHAM, General Introduction, in: *The Christian Understanding of Man*, Chicago 1938, pp. vii f.

14 J. H. OLDHAM, The Occasion and the Setting, in: *The Church and Its Function in Society*, London 1937, pp. 11–16, at p. 13.

15 Kenneth S. LATOURETTE, Community and Church. An Historical Survey and Interpretation, in: Kenneth S. LATOURETTE et al. (eds.), *Church and Community*, Chicago 1938, pp. 3–17, at p. 16.

16 J. H. OLDHAM, Some Concluding Reflections, in: Fred CLARKE et al. (eds.), *Church, Community and State in Relation to Education*, Chicago 1938, pp. 213–234, at pp. 213–215.



relations, activities and institutions, as to what is good and what is bad, what is just and what is unjust, what is permissible and what is forbidden«<sup>17</sup>. »Where such acceptance is lacking«, he warned, »society must fall to pieces«<sup>18</sup>.

This is a language of sacralization and *desacralization*, even if those terms were not used. Conference debates revolved around identifying what were referred to as »ultimate« ideas and realities, defining »essential« and »absolute« values and determining the true »ends« of life. The overriding message was a sense of the loss of genuine faith and the rise of artificial, secular replacements. There had previously been, it was claimed, a Christian understanding of the meaning of history, i. e. a relationship between humanity and the sacred, with human life's meaning and the rightness of a social order determined vis-à-vis something *above* or *beyond* it. In the sections that follow I will first examine how technology and science were seen at Oxford, how they related to concerns about the idealisation of »progress« and what measures were proposed to resacralize Christian »ultimate beliefs«.

### *Technology and science*

At Oxford, the downfall of Christian social models was depicted as having been accompanied by the rise of secular alternatives. As Latourette put it, »the religious vacuum« had been filled by »new enthusiasms«, such as »nationalism«<sup>19</sup>. Communism and Fascism, as I will address below, were also taken as the key ersatz »religions«. Among the non-Christian cultural ideals that had taken on sacralized qualities, science and technology (the latter usually, if often implicitly, defined as the practical application of the former) were also of central importance and seen as contributing factors to other replacement religions.

For example, Fred Clarke, Director of the University of London's Institute of Education, highlighted »the enormous power that modern invention may place in the hands of a resolute and ruthless central government«:

A revolution has taken place in our time comparable to that which was brought about by the invention of gunpowder, but on a vaster scale and with much more subtle consequences. What the earlier revolution did for feudalism, the later one may do for democracy, unless the urgency of the situation is grasped so as to make possible that reorientation which is demanded<sup>20</sup>.

17 Ibid., p. 215.

18 Ibid.

19 LATOURETTE, *Community and Church*, p. 16.

20 Fred CLARKE, *The Crisis in Education*, in: CLARKE et al. (eds.), *Church, Community and State in Relation to Education*, pp. 3–26, at p. 11.

Technology amplified human influence irrespective of the purpose to which it was put, granting an almost godlike power. The »technical aids which the contemporary state has at its disposal«, argued an anonymous contributor to the volume on education policy, »make it possible for its organs to have a kind of omnipresence which is feared more than the divine omnipresence«<sup>21</sup>.

Some warnings went beyond seeing technology as a mere accessory to political power. It was argued that the scientific ideal, to which technology was inseparably connected, was too often taken to an extreme: it came to represent not only a *means* to achieve certain ends but also an *end* in itself. Christian philosopher T. E. Jessop stressed that »the scientific account of man« – expressed, for example, in the influential works of Bertrand Russell – had achieved a new level of dominance: »We rise and sleep, work and play, in the keeping of science. We are almost dominated by it. This is one of the distinguishing marks of modern civilization«<sup>22</sup>. John Bennett, American Protestant theologian and social ethicist, pointed to technological change's opposition to »old patterns of life« as a key driver of contemporary problems: »Things move too fast for the mind to keep up with them and for them to keep up with each other«<sup>23</sup>. The broader issue here, which was also addressed at the conference, was »progress«.

### *Progress and history*

The problem with the idealisation of »progress« lay not in the belief that technological advancement was occurring – it obviously was, and various technological, medical or social improvements were described as both undeniable and welcome – but rather in the detachment of the moral evaluation of that progress from religious principles. American philosophy professor Eugene Lyman argued that secular »development« became seen as a universal law, fuelling an evolutionary optimism and an unthinking drive forwards that had precipitated the present crisis. Lyman here cited the works of influential philosopher and educational theorist, John Dewey, who sought to replace traditional Christian moral influences with a humanist progressivism that »combines the biological view of man with belief in progress«<sup>24</sup>. »Technology« was key to this aim: it »enormously advanced the subduing of nature to human interests« and

21 The Educational Task of the Church at the Present Time, in: CLARKE et al. (eds.), *Church, Community and State in Relation to Education*, pp. 175–210, at p. 188.

22 T. E. JESSOP, *The Scientific Account of Man*, in: T. E. JESSOP et al. (eds.), *The Christian Understanding of Man*, Chicago 1938, pp. 3–41, at p. 3.

23 JOHN C. BENNETT, *The Causes of Social Evil*, in: NILS EHRENSTROEM et al. (eds.), *Christian Faith and the Common Life*, London 1938, pp. 175–196, p. 184.

24 EUGENE H. LYMAN, *The Kingdom of God and History*, in: H. G. WOOD et al. (eds.), *The Kingdom of God and History*, Chicago 1938, pp. 75–104, at p. 87.

encouraged the belief that »human affairs« could be vastly improved through its »intelligent control«. It denied, Lyman argued, any standard for evaluating progress beyond the mere fact of progress itself<sup>25</sup>.

The (secular) conceptualisation of progress entailed a wholesale reconsideration of history. Lutheran theologian Heinz-Dietrich Wendland, for example (who would go on to significantly influence German Protestant social ethics in the post-war period), compared »sacred history« to »secular history«. »Sacred history« saw the active presence of God's grace in world events and understood the *telos* of human history as salvation through Christ: it was, in Wendland's view, essential to the Christian worldview<sup>26</sup>. But a range of »secular messianisms or utopias« had placed other ideas of the »outcome and goal of history« at the (sacralised) heart of their movements: such movements had borrowed these historical beliefs from Christianity but had »perverted« them<sup>27</sup>. In a similar vein, British Catholic historian Christopher Dawson stressed that history *alone* could offer no transcendent conclusions about life, as it demonstrated merely relativistic human experiences. Reliance upon a secular understanding of history, he suggested, would lead only to arbitrary views on morality and the meaning of life. Like Wendland, however, he argued that the Christian message was essentially historical: »sacred history« derived its meaning from its relationship to something outside of it, i. e. Christ as saviour<sup>28</sup>. It was secularism's denial of anything beyond the human and natural that was, from this point of view, the problem. Technology's ability to increase human power over nature (and over other humans) contributed to the modern belief in human self-sufficiency.

### *Self-sufficiency*

At Oxford 1937, sacralized *political* ideas were analysed as a key source for the belief in human self-sufficiency, in particular the »new faiths« of Communism and nationalism, »pseudo-religions« that replaced God with sacralized human ideals:

25 Ibid., pp. 87f.

26 H. D. WENDLAND, *The Kingdom of God and History*, in: WOOD et al. (eds.), *The Kingdom of God and History*, pp. 145–194, at pp. 152, 162f., 166.

27 Ibid., p. 167.

28 Christopher DAWSON, *The Kingdom of God and History*, in: WOOD et al. (eds.), *The Kingdom of God and History*, pp. 197–217, at p. 203.

They claim to be the sole ultimate source and authority for the life of the individual and the community in all departments; and they are resolutely bent on asserting this claim with ruthless intolerance and force. They put the classless society or the nation, its greatness and self-willed destiny, in the place of God<sup>29</sup>.

As noted, totalitarian political systems were a key focus at Oxford, but there were other sources of a misguided human self-sufficiency. Science, T. E. Jessop observed, claimed to describe and explain humanity entirely in its own terms<sup>30</sup>. Leading off the volume on faith and education, Fred Clarke developed this point with regard to both science and technology, making explicit the narrative of religious desacralization and secular sacralization: »The decline of older religious beliefs and ways of life leaves the way open to Promethean faith in man's collective power to help himself by drastic ›reconstruction‹«<sup>31</sup>. This »faith« had been fed by »a century or more of popular education and mechanical progress« and was not confined, Clarke argued, to the totalitarian lands<sup>32</sup>.

Yale theology professor R. L. Calhoun stressed this disregard of anything beyond the human as typical of »modernism«, which had become dominant over the preceding two centuries. Again, while totalitarian systems took this approach to an extreme, it was seen as common to all modern countries and political systems. »Present-day humanitarian modernism«, he claimed, had pushed the »comparatively high valuation of man and his earthly life« to a new level: »For some it has become a religion, ›the religion of humanity‹ in Comte's sense; for others within and without the churches, a substitute for religion«<sup>33</sup>.

An anonymous contributor to the volume on education made a similar point:

The process of secularization which our present civilization has undergone during the past several hundred years attempted to substitute for the transcendent God, who revealed himself in Christ, a this-worldly power (namely, the spirit of the universe); and it sought to find the unity of God and man, not in the person of Jesus Christ, but in the nature of man himself (i. e. the idea of humanity); it hoped for the realization of the kingdom of God on earth through the ideal future state or the perfection of human society (secularized eschatologies)<sup>34</sup>.

29 J. H. OLDHAM et al., *The Churches Survey Their Task. The Report of the Conference at Oxford, July 1937, on Church, Community and State*, London 1938, p. 202.

30 JESSOP, *Scientific Account of Man*, p. 4.

31 CLARKE, *Crisis in Education*, p. 15.

32 Ibid.

33 R. L. CALHOUN, *The Dilemma of Humanitarian Modernism*, in: JESSOP et al. (eds.), *The Christian Understanding of Man*, pp. 45–81, at p. 48.

34 [N. N.], *Educational Task of the Church*, p. 190.

Self-sufficiency was the key building block of the vision of »secular history« described in the previous section. What the secular ideologies – whether »liberal and humanitarian views«, »Marxist views« or »nationalistic« utopias<sup>35</sup> – had in common was their transformation of the ultimate goal *of* history into something that would be obtained *within* history. What these ideologies offered, as Wendland put it, was »a messianism without a messiah«: »sacred history is accordingly dissolved in secular history, while secular history in its turn is directly or indirectly turned into sacred history«<sup>36</sup>.

### *Need for a new Christianisation*

The conference offered not only complaints about declining faith and its secular competitors but also sought to present solutions. These revolved around restoring Christianity to a predominant place in Western culture: in essence resacralizing core Christian ideals, values and understandings of human life. Instead of the false unity of »blood and soil«, Christianity could provide a true »spiritual unity« and cultural orientation. As Orthodox philosopher Vasily Zenkovsky argued:

It is a Christian duty to throw a clear light upon the nature of the totalitarian tendencies of our day, and to show plainly that the true basis of a new civilization, the true way to create the »new man«, is to be found in Christianity alone<sup>37</sup>.

The Church's role was to evaluate and judge society according to ultimate principles and, as Oldham argued, engage in *resacralizing* these originally Christian values.

Its responsibility is to bring back the fundamentally perverted relationships of human society to their original course of divine-human harmony; to turn social life away from its false, perverted, sinful values, ideals, and aims, and to lead it to the *eternal, divine values, ideals, and aims*<sup>38</sup>.

What, precisely, the »eternal, divine values, ideals and aims« were was not clearly stated, remaining in fact a core topic of debate at the conference. However, there was a clear and repeated argument for denying self-sufficiency

35 WENDLAND, *Kingdom of God and History*, p. 167.

36 *Ibid.*, p. 169.

37 Vasily ZENKOVSKY, *The Totalitarian Idea and the Problem of Education*, in: CLARKE et al. (eds.), *Church, Community and State in Relation to Education*, pp. 29–62, at p. 32.

38 From Oldham's introduction, OLDHAM et al., *The Churches Survey Their Task*, p. 41, emphasis added.

and proclaiming the need to guide human actions – whether in the political or technological spheres – according to divine imperatives. *Re-sacralization* involved denying the self-sufficiency of humankind:

Human life is falling to pieces because it has tried to organize itself into a unity on a secularistic and humanistic basis without any reference to the divine Will and Power above and beyond itself. It has sought to be self-sufficient, a law unto itself. Nor is there any hope in the ascription of sacred quality to nation or State or class. A false sacred, a false God merely adds demonic power to the unredeemed passions of men<sup>39</sup>.

*»Ultimate« values and the totalitarian threat*

It may be helpful to draw together a few key conclusions from Oxford. There was a recurrent complaint about the decline of Christian ideas and principles and the rise of new »ultimate« values derived from secular sources. Technology was relevant to this context in two ways. First, new forms of surveillance, mass communication and social organisation aided totalitarian movements and regimes. Second, technology was itself something that – by its very nature – increased the underlying belief in human self-sufficiency common to all of the secular replacements for Christianity. Oldham repeatedly formulated the problem as *cultural*. There was »a crisis in modern culture«, he argued, »in the sense of the beliefs, standards and customs prevailing in the community«: there was a »weakening of the hold on men's minds of the Christian understanding of life and consequently the breakdown of the ethos inspired by it and the culture of which it was one of the main determinants«<sup>40</sup>. While the focus in 1937 was clearly on totalitarianism, technology was seen to have contributed to the modern age's crises. These themes would remain in the changed post-war conditions of the Amsterdam conference.

### 3.3 Amsterdam 1948

The topic of technology as such played a greater role at the 1948 conference, held under the overarching topic of »Man's Disorder and God's Design«. With the defeat of Fascism and National Socialism, the future of some kind of liberal-democratic capitalist society, at least in Western Europe and North America, seemed to have become more assured. Attention was more focused on the structure and trends predominant in Western modernity as a whole,

<sup>39</sup> Ibid., p. 68.

<sup>40</sup> OLDHAM, *Some Concluding Reflections*, pp. 213f.

regardless of whether in its capitalist or Communist form. The outlines of the social and historical analysis, however, were broadly similar: the *decline* of Christian »ultimate« values, the *rise* of competing secular values and the need for a *resacralization* of Christian ideals. Given the overall continuity in this broad set of understandings, I will concentrate in this section more on the concrete issue of technology, which, first, loomed larger as an independent theme at Amsterdam than it had at Oxford and, second, took on some of the connotations that totalitarianism had possessed at the earlier conference, though in a complex and ambivalent fashion.

### *Desacralization and technology*

At Amsterdam, the concern with secularisation – which was, as at Oxford, understood as the decline of the Christian sacred and the rise of competing secular sacreds – continued; however, compared to Oxford's clear focus on political ideologies, there was a new emphasis on the economic, scientific and technological realms as ersatz religions that had taken the place of Christianity. Willem Visser 't Hooft (who became the first General Secretary of the WCC) explained the modern context in which competing sacralized concepts interacted:

The word *faith* has acquired a new context. For most men, it is now faith in the new society, now to be founded once for all, in which the »good life« will be realised. Even in the present-day confusion, there are still many who believe that man, by wise planning, can master his own situation. Such men are interested not in absolute truth, but in achievement<sup>41</sup>.

These observations set the tone for the conference. As at Oxford, the problem here is one of a false sacralization of purely secular ideals (such as progress, development or »achievement«) and the creation of a self-sufficient human culture. Technology was not always referred to in isolation; however, there was a recurrent focus on efforts to build new, perfected societies through social planning that was repeatedly connected to technology, or as it was often referred to at the time, »technics«.

Visser 't Hooft described the rise of technological systems – »technics« – as one of the two »chief factors« that had caused the modern crisis. (The other was the issue of »the vast concentrations of power« present in both capitalism and communism, though these, too, were in part enabled by technology.) Society, »dominated as it is by technics«, was, he wrote, »more controlled by

41 In the report of Section II, The First Assembly of the World Council of Churches. The Official Report, London 1949, p. 65.

a momentum of its own than in previous periods«<sup>42</sup>. A working-group report similarly insisted that while »the disorder of society is primarily the disorder of man«, »the new fact of the present time is not only man's rebellion against God, but the merely physical fact of the too vast advance of technics with which man cannot cope«<sup>43</sup>. Capitalism and communism each used technological means to elevate specific values (economic freedom or egalitarianism, respectively) to sacralized extremes, and each violated, in different ways, Christian principles<sup>44</sup>.

In the international sphere, prominent American theologian Reinhold Niebuhr argued, growing technological interdependence had not brought global brotherhood but rather its opposite: »the increased intimacy of nations actually accentuated the evils of both imperial dominion and international conflict. Modern technics have, in short, created a potential, but not an actual, world community«<sup>45</sup>. French Christian philosopher Jacques Ellul – soon to become one of the best-known of the Christian techno-pessimists on the basis of his book, *The Technological Society*<sup>46</sup> – critiqued the rising dominance of technology over humanity.

To-day man is subordinated to *things* and the coming society is a society made for these things and not for man [...]. This primacy of the *thing* is the highest note of triumph of technics and production. Man must subordinate himself to the necessity of things, or be considered as a thing himself – a fact easily accepted by modern science and utilised by modern politics<sup>47</sup>.

This was the basis, Ellul claimed, of the rise of a new managerial »mass« psychology with totalitarian tendencies: »modern man no longer has any *spiritual cohesion*«, a comment that echoes those we have already encountered at Oxford eleven years earlier<sup>48</sup>.

Commentators at Amsterdam also emphasised positive sides of the new »technical developments«, which, as Visser 't Hooft wrote, had »relieved men and women of much drudgery and poverty«; moreover, »technical progress« had increased »channels of communication and interdependence« that had

42 Ibid., p. 75.

43 Ibid., p. 192.

44 Ibid., pp. 79f.

45 Reinhold NIEBUHR, God's Design and the Present Disorder of Civilisation, in: S. BATES et al. (eds.), *The Church and the Disorder of Society*, London 1948, pp. 13–28, at p. 23.

46 Jacques ELLUL, *The Technological Society*, trans. John WILKINSON, London 1965. The original edition, *La Technique ou l'Enjeu du siècle*, was published in 1954.

47 Jacques ELLUL, The Situation in Europe, in: BATES et al. (eds.), *The Church and the Disorder of Society*, pp. 50–60, at p. 56.

48 Ibid., p. 58.



at least the *potential* to reduce conflicts, particularly if they were spread more broadly, and equitably, across the world<sup>49</sup>. The increase of knowledge about the material world (science) and its application to social life (technics) was, for the most part, welcomed. As at Oxford, the key question was *how* technology was *used*. The modern belief in human self-sufficiency and the widespread »idolatry« of sacralized secular ideas were, again, the true culprits.

### *Self-sufficiency (reprise)*

The danger of human-centred beliefs in self-sufficiency continued to be a focus for the WCC. In his draft report for the conference, *Technics and Civilization*, Oldham wrote: »The belief in self-salvation through knowledge is the one great rival of Christian faith in the world today«<sup>50</sup>. Technology was the application of scientific knowledge, and the reports made it clear that the »materialist« mindset behind both of them was central to »man's disorder«. Paul Tillich – whose widely influential book *The Shaking of the Foundations* was published in the same year as the Amsterdam conference – asserted that there had been a change in the relationship between »man and the realm of ›things« that had followed upon (and driven onward) the »loss of a spiritual centre under the principle of immanence«. The »disappearance of an ultimate end« that »transcends all preliminary ends« and provides orientation for »all dealings with ›things« had opened a new, catastrophic era in social life<sup>51</sup>. Tillich succinctly expressed the argument that the Christian sacred had been demoted and replaced by a series of secular alternatives which shared the assumption that sacred ends could be discerned that were »immanent« to human life itself:

The discovery of new means has created new ends in turn; and there is no discernible limit to this discovery of new terrestrial »goods« through science. At the same time, however, the criterion of the value of an end has been lost. Man is engulfed in a continuous stream of ends which become means and means which become ends; the waves of this stream come and go without expressing anything unconditional, and without being

49 »Justice demands that the inhabitants of Asia and Africa, for instance, should have benefits of more machine production. They may learn to avoid the mechanisation of life and the other dangers of an unbalanced economy which impair the social health of the older industrial peoples«. VISSER 'T HOOFT (ed.), First Assembly, p. 75; similar points had been made at the Oxford conference: OLDHAM et al., *The Churches Survey Their Task*, p. 103.

50 J. H. OLDHAM, *Technics and Civilization (Part 1)*, Second Draft of »Man, Machine and Society«, Cadbury Research Library, Symons Collection; DA 43, Box 1, File WCC Assembly, Amsterdam '48, 1947, p. 27.

51 Paul TILlich, *The Disintegration of Society in Christian Countries*, in: Frank BENNETT et al. (eds.), *The Church's Witness to God's Design*, London 1948, pp. 53–64, at p. 59.

related to a transcendent criterion. [...] Man himself becomes a means in the service of »things«, and he becomes empty in the process of pursuing one provisional end after another without any ultimate end<sup>52</sup>.

The same wrongheaded cultural self-sufficiency that at Oxford had been seen as the origin of totalitarianism was now perceived behind the modern tendency to sacralize technologically enhanced human powers. The loss of a sacred and »unconditional« commitment to anything beyond human interest, power and will had left societies adrift and susceptible to new secular pseudo-religions.

*The »responsible society«*

As at Oxford, the delegates at Amsterdam sought to offer a plan through which Christians might engage with the world in order to end – or at least mitigate – the present crisis. »There is no inescapable necessity for society to succumb to undirected developments of technology«, Visser 't Hooft argued, »and the Christian Church has an urgent responsibility to-day to help men to achieve fuller personal life within the technical society«<sup>53</sup>. Broadly speaking, the aim was the same as that which had been stated at Oxford: the resacralization of what were seen as key Christian principles. At Amsterdam, however, a new concept emerged that would shape WCC activities for nearly two decades: »the responsible society«. The model of »the responsible society« was developed by J. H. Oldham across the Second World War. It was an attempt to identify concepts that could orient social ideals in accordance with Christian thinking<sup>54</sup>. The need was to define legitimate Christian »ends« that should govern individual and social life and to encourage forms of everyday life in which those ends could be pursued.

The »responsible society« derived from Christian social anthropology, positing a human being created by God with specific needs and aims: »a free being, responsible to God and his neighbour«. Therefore:

A responsible society is one where freedom is the freedom of men who acknowledge responsibility to justice and public order, and where those who hold political authority or economic power are responsible for its exercise to God and the people whose welfare is affected by it<sup>55</sup>.

52 Ibid.

53 VISSER 'T HOOFT (ed.), First Assembly, p. 75.

54 J. H. OLDHAM, A Responsible Society, in: BATES et al. (eds.), The Church and the Disorder of Society, pp. 120–154, at p. 128.

55 VISSER 'T HOOFT (ed.), First Assembly, p. 77.

From this conception of what human beings were flawed, if not a specific, detailed social model, at least criteria for judging those models that existed.

Men must never be made a mere means for political or economic ends. Man is not made for the State but the State for man. Man is not made for production, but production for man. For a society to be responsible under modern conditions it is required that the people have freedom to control, to criticise and to change their governments, that power be made responsible by law and tradition, and be distributed as widely as possible through the whole community. It is required that economic justice and provision of equality of opportunity be established for all the members of society<sup>56</sup>.

These principles, it was claimed, helped to evaluate where modern technological societies fell short. As Oldham put it in a draft of his paper for Amsterdam: »The revolution which is needed, if society is to be saved, is that the present absorption of interest in the technical mastery of things should give place to a primary concern with the relations of persons and of human groups«<sup>57</sup>. Here, again, we have an insistence on elevating particular governing principles to an ultimate, order-defining status.

#### *Technology and the »secularist revolt«*

Amsterdam thus offered a similar overall model to Oxford's analysis of a desecralization of Christian guiding concepts, a sacralization of secular alternatives and, finally, a necessary resacralization of Christian ideals. Technology was, in many regards, viewed positively, both as something that expressed a divinely granted human creativity and as a means of reducing human suffering. However, when it was seen negatively, technology was viewed through similar lenses as had totalitarianism: it was seen as encouraging a sense of human self-sufficiency and an idolatrous sacralization of ideals of »progress«. Christians themselves were not, it was asserted, without blame. While blaming secularisation was »the favourite Christian interpretation of our present distress«, argued one of the Amsterdam volumes<sup>58</sup>, the manifold failures of the Church – such as »its own uncritical identification of the ambiguous moral realities of a feudal society with the will of God« – had encouraged »the

<sup>56</sup> Ibid., pp. 77f.

<sup>57</sup> OLDHAM, *Technics and Civilization* (Draft), p. 36.

<sup>58</sup> BATES et al. (eds.), *The Church and the Disorder of Society*, p. 13.

secularist revolt«<sup>59</sup>. Still, it was argued that a »truly Christian interpretation of our present distress« must also seek »to correct the illusions which led modern secularism astray«<sup>60</sup>.

#### 4. Conclusion

I have shown how prominent mid-twentieth-century Christian analyses of technological modernity were driven by a focus on processes of sacralization, desacralization and resacralization. The political and social contexts of the two conferences I have examined clearly differed. As the delegates to Oxford assembled, totalitarian and authoritarian regimes were taking an ever larger share of power, and confidence in liberal democratic systems was waning. The inaugural conference in Amsterdam addressed a world still facing various crises, incipient East-West tensions and the monumental task of post-war rebuilding; however, the totalitarian threat had receded somewhat, and there was greater confidence that democratic states would, at least in the near future, be a Western norm.

However, specific issues such as totalitarianism and technology were connected by common concerns. Technology was seen to be like other aspects of human life, whether in the political or economic order: it had to be guided by genuinely religious impulses and aims, otherwise it posed a serious danger to healthy social development. As Otto Heinrich von der Gablentz put it in an Oxford report, God had placed human beings in nature so they could »shape it according to the real divine intention«, such as turning »the wilderness into a garden«. Technological development was central to this aim: human work of all kinds was a »direct service to God« when those who did it »help by their business to restore the rightful purpose of things«<sup>61</sup>. This restoration – a resacralization of Christian understandings regarding human life and the aims of human society – was the WCC's main aim.

In the introduction to an overall report on Oxford 1937, Oldham argued that secularisation had not meant the decline of faith as such, since »faith« had not disappeared:

59 *Ibid.*, p. 14; see also Emil BRUNNER, *And Now?*, in: BATES et al. (eds.), *The Church and the Disorder of Society*, pp. 176–180, at p. 178.

60 BATES et al. (eds.), *Church and the Disorder of Society*, p. 14.

61 O.H. von der GABLENTZ, *The Material Foundations of an International Order*, in: MARQUESS OF LOTHIAN et al. (eds.), *The Universal Church and the World of Nations*, Chicago 1938, pp. 61–94, at p. 64.

Every explanation of the meaning of human existence implies some kind of faith. The avowedly secular culture of to-day proves on examination to be either a pantheistic religion which identifies the whole of existence with holiness, or a rationalistic humanism for which the human reason is God, or a vitalistic humanism which worships as its God some vital force in the individual or in the community. The religion of modern civilization is in fact a very old religion dressed up in a new form. It is the old religion of self-glorification described by St. Paul in the first chapter of the Epistle to the Romans<sup>62</sup>.

The dominant faith of the West had been secularised but also sacralized. While the humanistic ideal had had many successes, there was a problem: »There is no unconditional claim to give life meaning and direction«<sup>63</sup>. The necessary »unconditional claim« was that of God on humanity as expressed in sacred Christian understandings of the meanings of life. Even if the term »sacred« was not always used, there was recurrent and intense focus throughout the conference reports on precisely these »primary« and »absolute« loyalties and on »ultimate« values that defined the social order. In this instance we have, perhaps, a somewhat more diffuse understanding of the sacred than in some other contexts: here it is not a specific text or object or person that is elevated to an ultimate, ineffable and order-giving status but rather the entirety of what was collectively understood as the proper relationship among human beings and between them and God. What was »sacred« was God's plan for how human life should be organised and the principles that these historical actors believed to have distilled from Christian traditions in order to answer the question: how should people live together? The conference participants debated the specific formulations of what these sacred truths offered, but they did not debate that they were there, somewhere, to be found in the truths of their faith. Moreover, they were equally all convinced of the threat posed by the false social order around them, discerning worrying elements of a sacralised – if secular – religion of technological modernity.

I do not argue that the perceived »sacralization« of secular categories was *in fact* being undertaken. My focus here is on understanding Christian viewpoints that led to particular efforts on their part. There were, clearly, many movements, institutions and individuals who *did* uphold rationalism, science, progress, the positive power of technology or the values of social betterment as ultimate and order-defining ideals. Indeed, Europe in the 1930s and 1940s was awash in competing claims that new planned societies based on technological progress would sweep away old inefficiencies and injustices<sup>64</sup>: whether

62 From Oldham's introduction, OLDHAM et al., *The Churches Survey Their Task*, p. 35.

63 Id., *Some Concluding Reflections*, p. 218.

64 See, e. g., the contribution by Gregor Feindt in this volume.

such idealisations rise to the level of »sacralizations« is an interesting question, but not one with which I am concerned here. Clearly, the *perception* of such a competing sacralization of secular values shaped the worldview and motivated the actions of those involved with building up the WCC and defining its social message.

## IV. CONTESTED SACRALIZATIONS IN THE ANTHROPOCENE





Thomas Kirchhoff

## (De)Sacralizations of Nature in Modern Western Societies

### 1. Introduction

Perceptions of nature as sacred could be considered as a phenomenon that has well persisted in so-called ethnic religions within traditional societies<sup>1</sup>, while it is at best a marginal phenomenon in modern Western societies. In the latter, one could assume sacralizations of nature to be confined to a few small social-cultural groups such as strictly devout Christians seeing nature as God's holy creation. One could hypothesize that this is especially the case since we are living in the so-called Anthropocene, in which human influence on nature is omnipresent so that some theorists have even declared the »end of nature«<sup>2</sup>. But with my analysis I will demonstrate that this impression is deceptive: Sacralizations of nature are widespread in modern Western societies, even in the age of the »Anthropocene«. They represent perceptions of nature that are by no means marginal in modern Western societies. They are not limited to more or less esoteric movements like religious naturalism<sup>3</sup>, Dark Green Religion<sup>4</sup>, or creation-theological ethics of nature<sup>5</sup>. Rather, sacralizations of

- 1 Joanne O'BRIEN/Martin PALMER, *The Atlas of Religion*, Berkeley 2007; Gonzalo OVIEDO/Sally JEANRENAUD, *Protecting Sacred Natural Sites of Indigenous and Traditional Peoples. An IUCN Perspective*, Gland 2005; Robert WILD / Christopher McLEOD (eds.), *Sacred Natural Sites. Guidelines for Protected Area Managers*, Gland 2008.
- 2 See e.g., Bill McKIBBEN, *The End of Nature*, New York 1989; Steven VOGEL, *Environmental philosophy after the end of nature*, in: *Environmental Ethics* 24/1 (2002), pp. 23–39; Elena CASETTA, *Making sense of nature conservation after the end of nature*, in: *History and Philosophy of the Life Sciences* 42 (2020), article 18, URL: <<https://doi.org/10.1007/s40656-020-00312-3>> (06-12-2023).
- 3 See e.g., Donald A. CROSBY, *Religion of Nature*, Albany 2002; Jerome A. STONE, *Religious Naturalism Today: The Rebirth of a Forgotten Alternative*, Albany 2008; Donald A. CROSBY/Jerome A. STONE (eds.) *The Routledge Handbook of Religious Naturalism*, London 2018.
- 4 See e.g., Bron TAYLOR, *Dark Green Religion. Nature Spirituality and the Planetary Future*, Berkeley 2010.
- 5 See e.g., Seyyed Hossein NASR, *Man and Nature. The Spiritual Crisis of Modern Man*, London 1968; Sallie McFAGUE, *The Body of God. An Ecological Theology*, Minneapolis 1993; Celia E. DEANE-DRUMMOND, *The Ethics of Nature*, Malden 2004; id., *Eco-Theology*, London 2008; Gregor TAXACHER, *Apokalypse ist jetzt. Vom Schweigen der Theologie im Angesicht der Endzeit*, Gütersloh 2012; Julia ENXING, *Und Gott schuf den Erdling: Plädoyer für eine neue Anthropologie, die die nichtmenschliche Schöpfung mitdenkt*, in: *Herder-Korrespondenz* 74/3 (2020), pp. 24–26.

nature represent essential mainstream perceptions of nature and widespread motivations for its appreciation and protection. Nature, rather than having been terminated by humans, continues to exist pervasively in human perception, even in the »Anthropocene«.

Modernization theory originated from ideas of Max Weber and Talcott Parsons and became a dominant paradigm in the 1950s and 1960s, assuming a progressive transition from »premodern« or »traditional« to »modern« societies. This transition was thought to include a progressive process of secularization, i. e., the transformation from identification with religious institutions, values, and behavioral patterns as well as religious concepts of history, society, and individuality toward non-religious institutions, values, concepts etc. in all aspects of social life and governance<sup>6</sup>. As Charles Wright Mills has put it:

Once the world was filled with the sacred – in thought, practice, and institutional form. After the Reformation and the Renaissance, the forces of modernization swept across the globe and secularization, a corollary historical process, loosened the dominance of the sacred. In due course, the sacred shall disappear altogether except, possibly, in the private realm<sup>7</sup>.

In the meantime, modernization theory is widely considered to be refuted, regarding its universal-historical, global claim to validity, but also regarding its claims about the development of Western societies, especially its assumptions about secularization<sup>8</sup>. The current secularization debate paints a differentiated picture of modern Western societies<sup>9</sup>: These might feature a decline in adherence to churches but neither an all-encompassing and teleological process of secularization nor a slow and steady death of religion. Rather, we witness a pluralization of clerical religion, persisting and new forms of religiosity outside the church as well as localized secularizations and localized

6 Pippa NORRIS/Ronald INGLEHART, *Sacred and Secular. Religion and Politics Worldwide*, Cambridge 2011; Volkhard KRECH, *Secularization, re-enchantment, or something in between? Methodical considerations and empirical observations concerning a controversial historical idea*, in: Marion EGGERT/Lucian HOELSCHER (eds.), *Religion and Secularity. Transformations and Transfers of Religious Discourses in Europe and Asia*, Leiden 2013, pp. 77–108.

7 Charles Mills WRIGHT, *The Sociological Imagination*, Oxford 1959, pp. 32f.

8 Wolfgang KNOEHL, *Theories that won't pass away. The never-ending story*, in: Gerard DELANTY/Engin F. ISIN (eds.), *Handbook of Historical Sociology*, London 2003, pp. 96–107; Hans JOAS, *Do We Need Religion? On the Experience of Self-transcendence*, London 2008.

9 *Ibid.*; NORRIS/INGLEHART, *Sacred and Secular*; KRECH, *Secularization, re-enchantment, or something in between?*

sacralizations. Some authors even note tendencies towards desecularization<sup>10</sup> or proclaim a postsecular era<sup>11</sup>.

In the sense of this differentiated debate on secularization, I will highlight nine types of sacralization of nature that are present and culturally influential in modern Western societies. They either emerged in recent decades or are older in terms of the history of ideas but have remained influential. Not only as a contrast but as a cultural background and to illuminate the interplay among secularizations, sacralizations and desacralizations, I will also characterize three types of desacralization of nature.

The description of these twelve types is not intended to represent a typology, i. e., a system of types that would be comprehensive and homogeneous with respect to any set of specific criteria. Rather, I want to highlight that there is a broad and heterogeneous spectrum of different types of desacralizations and sacralizations of nature having in common that they have been culturally influential in modern Western cultures for decades or even centuries. In doing so, I focus on extra-religious sacralizations in order to demonstrate that sacralizations of nature are not at all limited to people who would characterize themselves as religious but are also widespread among people considering themselves as non-religious, or even atheistic. I limit my analysis to desacralizations and sacralizations of the natural environment, thus ignoring desacralizations and sacralizations of the human body, and I confine it to large-scale spatial phenomena such as landscape and wilderness, thus ignoring desacralizations and sacralizations of single organisms or species. As sacralizations and desacralizations of nature represent culturally shaped patterns of perception, an analysis that would be generally valid for all cultures is impossible. Cross- or interculturally valid general statements can at most be made about groups of cultures that are relatively similar in their basic patterns of nature, landscape, and wilderness perception. This applies to modern Western societies, to which this study refers with a focus upon European societies. Within these, there is, indeed, not one single uniform pattern of perception or, more specifically, pattern of sacralization and desacralization of nature but a diversity of different patterns. However, this intracultural spectrum, in its entirety, is fairly similar within different modern societies of the Western type. Cross-cultural transferability of the results of this study to some non-western and / or non-modern cultures may be possible in some respects but would have to be examined carefully in each case.

10 Peter L. BERGER, *The desecularization of the world: a global overview*, in: Peter L. BERGER (ed.), *The Desecularization of the World. Resurgent Religion and World Politics*, Washington 1999, pp. 1–18.

11 Jürgen HABERMAS, *Notes on post-secular society*, in: *New Perspectives Quarterly* 25/4 (2008), pp. 17–29.

## 2. Intra-religious and extra-religious sacralizations

Before presenting my description of different types of sacralization of nature, I need to explain what I mean by »sacralization of nature«, i. e., conceptualizations and perceptions of nature as divine, sacred, holy, awe-inspiring, sublime, allembicing or comprehensive, intangible, non-negotiable, or as an absolute instance.

Following Volkhard Krech and other religious scholars<sup>12</sup>, I distinguish between intra-religious and extra-religious sacralizations. For the former, a direct reference to a deity is constitutive: The sacralization is based on the certainty of faith that something refers to a deity, bears witness to a deity – and if this deity is seen as transcendent, as in Christianity, a transcendental relationship to a deity is constitutive for intra-religious sacralizations. By contrast, extra-religious sacralizations – that emerged about 1800 in reaction to the Enlightenment disenchantment and instrumentalization of the world – neither rely on a reference to any deity nor require a positive religion, i. e., an institutionalized religion in the sense of a constituted organization like the Christian churches. Rather, they are constituted by a particular type of human experience: the experience of self-transcendence, i. e., the awareness of a transgression of one's own self. However, not every experience of self-transcendence constitutes a sacralization but only such experiences, which carry us out of the everyday horizon of expectation and interpretation – and in which it becomes subjectively evident to us that we are connected or confronted with something comprehensive, higher etc. that is subjectively experienced as an unconditional instance. This instance can still be a deity but it no longer has to be one. Thus, even atheists can have experiences of selftranscendence, in which they experience something as sacred.

Extra-religious sacralizations can extend to any social entity but there are preferred fields: these include reason, tradition, the nation, and, established most notably by romanticism, love, art, the person, and nature. They represent a subjectivization and individualization of the sacred that is no longer an ontological property independent of people but founded in individual experiences of human subjects. This does not mean, however, that the attribution

12 Volkhard KRECH, Beobachtungen zu Sakralisierungsprozessen in der Moderne – mit einem Seitenblick auf Kunstreligion, in: Hermann DEUSER et al. (eds.), *Metamorphosen des Heiligen. Struktur und Dynamik von Sakralisierung am Beispiel der Kunstreligion*, Tübingen 2015, pp. 411–425; Magnus SCHLETTE / Volkhard KRECH, *Sakralisierung*, in: Detlef POLLACK et al. (eds.), *Handbuch Religionssoziologie*, Wiesbaden 2018, pp. 437–463; cf. JOAS, *Do We Need Religion?*; Markus KLEINERT / Magnus SCHLETTE, *Einleitung. Das Heilige und die Kunstreligion*, in: Hermann DEUSER et al. (eds.), *Metamorphosen des Heiligen. Struktur und Dynamik von Sakralisierung am Beispiel der Kunstreligion*, Tübingen 2015, pp. 1–45; Hans JOAS, *The Power of the Sacred. An Alternative to the Narrative of Disenchantment*. Translated by Alex SKINNER, Oxford 2021.

of sacredness is entirely left to individual discretion: Between the metaphysically given and the individually arbitrary lies the realm of the social – and extra-religious sacralizations represent social attributions of sacredness that follow culturally shaped, intersubjective, collective patterns and semantics<sup>13</sup>. This holds true for perceptions of nature, in our example sacralizations of nature, as well<sup>14</sup>.

My terminological distinction between intra-religious and extra-religious sacralizations presupposes a narrow definition of religion like Émile Durkheim's classic definition: »A religion is a unified system of beliefs and practices relative to sacred things [...] which unite into one single moral community called a Church, all those who adhere to them«<sup>15</sup>. If one would prefer a broader definition of religion or religiosity that encompasses both forms of sacralization, one would have to speak instead of, e.g., church-bound sacralizations as against sacralizations outside or beyond church-bound religion.

### 3. Three desacralizations and nine sacralizations of nature

#### 3.1 Desacralization of nature in monotheistic religions

The culture of most modern Western societies has been deeply shaped in many respects by Christianity<sup>16</sup>. Thus, one might expect that Christian sacralization of nature is, so to speak, the default way of perceiving nature in the history of Western cultures. However, rather the opposite is true as the turning away from external nature is constitutive for Christianity as for Judaism and Islam – at least regarding their demarcation from the older pagan or ethnic religions, against which they tried to assert themselves.

Central for most of these ethnic religions was the belief that deities and spirits dwell in natural phenomena and guide natural events. Certain areas were considered divine and sacred because they were believed to be the abode or domain of a particular deity. Particularly natural phenomena that appeared

13 KRECH, *Beobachtungen zu Sakralisierungsprozessen in der Moderne*, pp. 420f.

14 Denis E. COSGROVE, *Social Formation and Symbolic Landscape*, Madison <sup>2</sup>1998 (first published in 1984); Emily BRADY, *Aesthetics of the Natural Environment*, Cornwall 2003; Thomas KIRCHHOFF, »Natur« als kulturelles Konzept, in: *Zeitschrift für Kulturphilosophie* 5 (2011), pp. 69–96; id./Vera VICENZOTTI, A historical and systematic survey of European perceptions of wilderness, in: *Environmental Values* 23/4 (2014), pp. 443–464; Nigel COOPER et al., Aesthetic and spiritual values of ecosystems. Recognising the ontological and axiological plurality of cultural ecosystem »services«, in: *Ecosystem Services* 21, Part B (2016), pp. 218–229.

15 Émile DURKHEIM, *The Elementary Forms of Religious Life*, New York 1995 (first published 1912), p. 44, emphasized in the original.

16 Cf. Marvin PERRY, *Western Civilization. A Brief History*, Boston 2012; Jörg LAUSTER, *Die Verzauberung der Welt. Eine Kulturgeschichte des Christentums*, München <sup>o</sup>2020.

powerful or conspicuous or were essential for survival were considered sacred, e. g., mountains, forests, and waterfalls, certain animals, and plants, but also rain and wind. In contrast, it is constitutive for the monotheistic religions that the commandments delivered by the prophet set a law independent of external nature. In Christianity, in its origins and in its orthodox form until the early modern period, the divine is displaced from nature into a transcendent sphere that is inaccessible in earthly life. Ethnic religions are referred to as nature religions and devalued as such, its holy places either destroyed or reinterpreted in Christian terms. Uncultivated nature – wilderness beyond town and castle, village, and field – had almost only negative meanings as a place of evil beyond the divine laws. Some Christian theologians interpreted rugged mountains as the ruins of the originally flat world, testifying to the Flood, and seas as the remains of the Flood, inhabited by monsters – and interpreted both as signs of divine punishment<sup>17</sup>. In the Christian worldview, nature was thus initially and unchanged for centuries anything but sacred.

This basic Christian devaluation of external nature – in connection with the idea that humans are created in the image of God and with the derivation that humans dominate the external nature – was later interpreted, within the framework of the ecology movement, as the cause of the ecological crisis<sup>18</sup>. Following this interpretation, a complex spectrum of new kinds of Christian theologies of creation has developed, which in various ways oppose anthropocentric positions and the devaluation of external nature<sup>19</sup>.

### 3.2 Early modern Christian resacralization of nature and wilderness

Around 1700, a radical change occurred in Christian thinking about nature. While traditionally the world was regarded as finite because only God was infinite, it was now argued – notably by the English philosopher Henry

17 Marjorie Hope NICOLSON, *Mountain Gloom and Mountain Glory. The Development of the Aesthetics of the Infinite*, Seattle 1959, pp. 184–224.

18 This interpretation was famously developed by Lynn WHITE, *The historical roots of our ecological crisis*, in: *Science* 155 (1967), pp. 1203–1207. For a similar view see e. g., Carl AMERY, *Das Ende der Vorsehung. Die gnadenlosen Folgen des Christentums*, Reinbek 1972. For critical analyses of this interpretation, see Hans J. MUENK, *Umweltkrise – Folge und Erbe des Christentums? Historisch-systematische Überlegungen zu einer umstrittenen These im Vorfeld ökologischer Ethik*, in: *JCSW – Jahrbuch für Christliche Sozialwissenschaften* 28 (1987), pp. 133–206; Christof HARDMEIER / Konrad OTT, *Naturethik und biblische Schöpfungserzählung. Ein diskurs-theoretischer und narrativ-hermeneutischer Brückenschlag*, Stuttgart 2015.

19 See e. g., McFAGUE, *The Body of God*; DEANE-DRUMMOND, *The Ethics of Nature*; id., *Eco-Theology*; Ernst M. CONRADIE et al. (eds.), *Christian Faith and the Earth. Current Paths and Emerging Horizons in Ecotheology*, London 2014.

More of the »Cambridge Platonist School« in his *Enchiridion Metaphysicum* (1671) – that the predicates of God had to belong to the world, to space, and nature, as well to his creation. Under this premise an aesthetics of the infinite developed, and within the Christian worldview the category of the natural sublime arose, which connected the sensual und the supersensual, the physical und the metaphysical<sup>20</sup>: Natural phenomena that overwhelm the human sensuality due to their size or complexity of form evokes the idea of the infinite and thus point to God as their Creator. Experience of God – traditionally said to be possible through inner contemplation only, i. e., by turning away from nature – was now said to be possible by turning to nature as well. Gottfried Wilhelm Leibniz argued that the world created by God, and thus nature, had to be the best of all possible worlds with a perfect order because God was benevolent, omnipotent, and wise. Physico-theological authors as John Ray and William Derham interpreted natural perfection as self-revelation of the benevolent, almighty, and wise God: Natural science became natural theology<sup>21</sup>.

Subsequently, especially wilderness became sacred nature as a place where the perfect original divine order (*natura integra*) was not yet altered by humans. According to Shaftesbury, humans cannot recognize this perfect divine order scientifically-rationally because of its infinite complexity, so that wilderness at first appears as disordered and disharmonious; however, humans can recognize this perfect divine order if they refrain from their finite ideas of order and surrender themselves to purposefree aesthetic contemplation.

I shall no longer resist the Passion growing in me for Things of a *natural* kind; where neither *Art*, nor the *Conceit* or *Caprice* of Man has spoil'd their *genuine Order*, by breaking in upon that *primitive State*. Even the rude *Rocks*, the mossy *Caverns*, the irregular unwrought *Grotto's*, and broken *Falls* of Waters, with all the horrid *Graces* of the *Wilderness* itself, as representing Nature more, will be the more engaging, and appear with a Magnificence beyond the formal Mockery of princely Gardens<sup>22</sup>.

20 Ernest Lee TUVESON, Space, deity, and the »natural sublime«, in: *Modern Language Quarterly* 12/1 (1951), pp. 20–38; NICOLSON, *Mountain Gloom and Mountain Glory*, pp. 271–323.

21 Cf. Alexandra WALSHAM, *The Reformation of the Landscape. Religion, Identity, and Memory in Early Modern Britain and Ireland*, Oxford 2011, chapter 5, especially pp. 376–394; Kaspar von GREYERZ, *European Physico-Theology (1650–c.1760) in Context. Celebrating Nature and Creation*, Oxford 2022.

22 Anthony Ashley Cooper SHAFTESBURY, *Characteristicks of Men, Manners, Opinions, Times*, vol. 2, Indianapolis 2001 (first published in 1732), pp. 393f.

Unable to declare the Use or Service of all things in this Universe, we are yet assured of the Perfection of *all*, and of the Justice of that *Oeconomy*, to which all things are subservient, and in respect of which, Things seemingly deformed are amiable; Disorder becomes regular; Corruption wholesome<sup>23</sup>.

In this vein, especially mountains were cherished as »natural cathedrals«. However, forests too were perceived as »a green temple of the Almighty«<sup>24</sup>.

Thus, Christian sacralizations of nature have been particularly influential in North America<sup>25</sup>, where they were further developed by the transcendentalists of the early 19th century, namely Ralph Waldo Emerson and Henry David Thoreau. These authors linked spirituality with a Puritan ideal of simplicity of living, identified the relatively unspoiled American landscape, especially wilderness, as singular and immanent manifestation of God, and argued that the highest purpose of nature was to act as means, through which God revealed himself to men and women<sup>26</sup>. The Scottish-American naturalist John Muir stated that »[t]he clearest way into the Universe is through a forest wilderness«<sup>27</sup> and described that in the Sierra Nevada »everything seems equally divine, opening a thousand windows to show us God [...] – one smooth pure wild glow of Heaven’s love«<sup>28</sup>. Monumental natural phenomena – impressive mountains, huge waterfalls, forests of giant trees, and wilderness in general – were interpreted as evidence for the linking of the US-American nation with a higher purpose, as it is represented in paintings like *Among the Sierra Nevada, California* (1868) and *Rocky Mountain Landscape* (1870) by Albert Bierstadt.

All these sacralizations are intra-religious because the transfer of sublimity from God via external nature to the human soul is constitutive for the aesthetic experience – that indicates awe of nature and, ultimately, awe of God the Creator.

23 Ibid., pp. 388f.

24 Johann Gottfried HERDER, *Sämtliche Werke*, ed. by Bernhard SUPHAN, Berlin 1877–1913, vol. IV, p. 440, my translation.

25 Roderick Frazier NASH, *Wilderness and the American Mind*, New Haven 52014.

26 Charles R. SIMPSON, *The wilderness in American capitalism: the sacralization of nature*, in: *International Journal of Politics, Culture, and Society* 5 (1992), pp. 555–576, at pp. 556f.

27 John MUIR, *Alaska fragments, june-july, 1890*, in: Linnie MARSH WOLFE (ed.), *John of the Mountains. The Unpublished Journals of John Muir*, Madison 1979 (first published in 1890), pp. 311–322, at p. 313.

28 John MUIR, *My first summer in the Sierra (Part II), 1869*, in: *The Atlantic Monthly* (February 1911), pp. 170–181, at pp. 171f.



### 3.3 Desacralization of nature by the modern sciences

Most sacralizations of nature presented in the following can only be understood against the background of a fundamental desacralization of nature in modern Western cultures that dates back to the scientific revolution<sup>29</sup>. Building on novel approaches developed by Francis Bacon in his *Novum Organum Scientiarum* (1620), René Descartes in his *Discours de la Méthode* (1637), Galileo Galilei in his *Discorsi e Dimostrazioni Matematiche intorno a due nuove scienze* (1638) and by many others, the modern natural sciences emerged. These were based on experience, proceeded analytically and recognized causal causes only. Nature was no longer thought as an expression of a divine semiosis, as a book to be read in, but as nothing more than matter in motion that was to be objectively described and technologically appropriated. This development set an end to physicotheology and to references to mysterious forces and led to what Max Weber<sup>30</sup> later called the »disenchantment of the world«: nature as a completely desacralized, controllable object and as a mere resource for technical and cultural endeavors of humans.

### 3.4 Early romantic aesthetic sacralization of nature

One of the earliest but still very influential types of extra-religious sacralization of nature emerged around 1800 in the early Romantic period in different European countries<sup>31</sup>. The Romantics complained that the Enlightenment with its orientation towards analytic reason leads to an objectification and disenchantment of the world, to the dissolution of religious meaning, and, indeed, of meaning at all. In this situation, early Romanticism pursued a religion of art: the idea and individual practice of aesthetic recreation of a higher, magical reality beyond the everyday world objectified by reason. »For this is the beginning of all poetry, to cancel the progression and laws of rationally thinking reason, and to transplant us once again into the beautiful confusion of imagination, into the original chaos of human nature«<sup>32</sup>. The aesthetically productive subject should create a fleeting moment, in which the isolated individual could experience a dissolution of the boundaries of its individual

29 Steven SHAPIN, *The Scientific Revolution*, Chicago 2018.

30 Max WEBER, *Science as a vocation*, in: Id. (ed.), *The Vocation Lectures: »Science as a Vocation«, »Politics as a Vocation«*, Indianapolis 2004 (first published in 1919), pp. 1–31, at p. 20.

31 Paul de MAN, *The Rhetoric of Romanticism*, New York 1984; Stephen PRICKETT / Simon HAINES (eds.), *European Romanticism. A Reader*, London 2010.

32 Friedrich SCHLEGEL, *Dialogue on Poetry and Literary Aphorisms*, University Park 1968 (first published in 1800), p. 86.

self and, thus, a subjective sense of reintegration into an original wholeness. Notabene, the romantics were aware that yearning for the transcendent on earth was unfulfillable; but by looking for it there, the whole world was haloed for them.

One classical topos of this romantic enchantment with nature is the view to the horizon, where earth and sky, the material and the immaterial aesthetically merge – so that a unity of the otherwise separated can be imagined. Within a forest, similar aesthetic experiences are possible: when light and shadow merge in the play of leaves, when the view into the distance gets lost somewhere between the trunks. Many paintings by Caspar David Friedrich represent this romantic sacralization of nature. The topos of *Waldeinsamkeit*, a hardly translatable term coined by Ludwig Tieck and prevalent in the work of Joseph von Eichendorff, transmutes the forest into a place of communion with nature and retreat in a changing society, into a timeless ideal dream-world, a shelter, in which old fairy tales, legends and values still appear alive. Another classic topos of the romantic enchantment is gruesome or threatening nature like deep dark ravines that mirrors the abyss of one's soul which are neither controlled nor controllable by the mind – the later unconscious in psychoanalysis<sup>33</sup>. Especially since the Romantic period, an aesthetic of nature has been constituted – in opposition to the process of civilization – that invokes experiences of sacredness in the chaotic, the violent, and the wild<sup>34</sup>.

### 3.5 Rousseauian moral sacralization of the natural

In most modern Western societies, a »naturalness-bonus«<sup>35</sup>, i. e., an assumed intrinsic superiority of the natural over the artificial, not to say a »cult of naturalness« is well established and widespread. Many versions of this cult can be traced back to Jean-Jacques Rousseau<sup>36</sup>.

33 KIRCHHOFF / VICENZOTTI, A historical and systematic survey of European perceptions of wilderness, pp. 451f.

34 Horst Dieter RAUH, Heilige Wildnis. Naturästhetik von Hölderlin bis Beuys, Paderborn 1998, p. 7.

35 Dieter BIRNBACHER, Naturalness, in: Online Encyclopedia Philosophy of Nature, Heidelberg 2019, ed. by Thomas KIRCHHOFF, URL: <<https://doi.org/10.11588/oePN.2019.0.65607>> (06-12-2023).

36 The following description is based on KIRCHHOFF / VICENZOTTI, A historical and systematic survey of European perceptions of wilderness, pp. 450f.; Christopher BERTRAM, Jean Jacques Rousseau, in: The Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy (Winter 2020 Edition), ed. by Edward N. ZALTA, URL: <<https://plato.stanford.edu/archives/win2020/entries/rousseau/>> (06-12-2023).

While the Enlightenment conceives of the history of humanity as progress shaped by humans, leading from a »raw« primordial state to a morally and economically prosperous civilization that is determined by reason, Rousseau criticizes the civilization of his time (*homme civilisé*) as characterized by intolerable inequality, self-love (*amour propre*), and alienation from one's own self. In comparison, Rousseau contrasts the antecedent stage of *homme barbare* as characterized by authenticity, equality, and natural compassion: After humans initially – since they did not need one another to provide for their material needs – had lived basically solitary lives as nomadic hunting proto-humans (*homme sauvage*), communities of sedentary agricultural communities emerged. The social division of labor was a defining feature of these communities, in which humans lived unalienated from themselves in communal harmony with each other and with external nature (*homme barbare*). However, this harmonious state – inevitably and irreversibly – vanished with the establishment of private property and, thus, the emergence of inequality. In an unequal society, however, human beings who need both the social good of recognition and such material goods as food, warmth, etc. become enmeshed in social relations that are inimical to their freedom, to their sense of self-worth, and to feelings of compassion due to the clear incentive for people to misrepresent their true beliefs and desires in order to attain their ends.

Notabene, Rousseau did not believe that a return to the state of the *homme barbare* was possible. He was not a representative of primitivism; the famous phrase »back to nature« was not his own but falsely attributed to him by his contemporary critics. Instead, Rousseau's political ideal was the progression towards a republican, agrarian society, in which liberty, equality, and fraternity were realized by a social contract based on reasonable civic virtue. To this end, the social contract could not be based on the particular interests of the rich and propertied, which were illegitimately passed off as universal interests. Rather, they had to be based on the general will (*volonté générale*), i. e., the collective will for the common good of the citizen body taken as a whole, as against the will of all (*volonté de tous*), i. e., the sum of all particular individual interests.

With his narrative of the evolution of humanity, Rousseau laid the foundation for a »cult of naturalness« that opposes » alienation by civilization«, although the ideal state of this narrative is not a primordial but a post-civilization state of culture. Examples of this cult are the appreciation of pastoral landscapes and their inhabitants, the topos of the noble savage<sup>37</sup>, the veneration of

37 Terry Jay ELLINGSON, *The Myth of the Noble Savage*, Berkeley 2001.

indigenous people and knowledge<sup>38</sup>, the ideal of authenticity<sup>39</sup>, many strands of the life-reform movement<sup>40</sup>, and the homesteading movement<sup>41</sup>. What is sacralized here is an alleged inherent individual natural essence of humans, or the cultural phenomena created by unalienated humans.

Although Rousseau himself was not a proponent of a cult of naturalness, which is often attributed to him, he did help establish new forms of aesthetic appreciation of nature. He initially grounded this appreciation of nature in his religious view that Christianity should break with orthodox views and instead embrace a deism, in which the worship of nature is acceptable as a response to God's creation, but eventually he detached the foundation of this appreciation from any religious basis<sup>42</sup>.

### 3.6 Herderian sacralization of unique cultural landscapes

The emergence of heritage protection movements across European societies around 1900 was accompanied by the sacralization of unique cultural landscapes. Their protection is still an essential goal of nature and landscape conservation, and – via so-called loyalty-based values – one of its essential motivations.

Much of what many people deplore about the human subversion of nature [...] has to do with the loss of places that they keep in shared memory and cherish with collective loyalty. Many fears stem from the loss of the particular – the specific characteristics of places that make them ours<sup>43</sup>.

38 For such a view see e.g., Fikret BERKES, *Sacred Ecology*, London 42017; Madhav GADGIL et al., *Indigenous Knowledge for Biodiversity Conservation*, in: *Ambio* 22 (1993), pp. 151–156; Raymond PIEROTTI, *Indigenous Knowledge, Ecology, and Evolutionary Biology*, New York 2010. For a critical analysis of such views, see Alix COOPER, *Inventing the Indigenous. Local Knowledge and Natural History in Early Modern Europe*, Cambridge 2007.

39 Charles TAYLOR, *The Ethics of Authenticity*, Cambridge 1992.

40 Michael HAU, *The Cult of Health and Beauty in Germany. A Social History, 1890–1930*, Chicago 2003.

41 Rebecca KNEALE GOULD, *Modern homesteading in America: negotiating religion, nature, and modernity*, in: *Worldviews* 3/3 (1999), pp. 183–212.

42 Gilbert F. LAFRENIERE, *Rousseau and the European roots of environmentalism*, in: *Environmental History Review* 14/4 (1990), pp. 41–72, at p. 43.

43 Committee on Noneconomic and Economic Value of Biodiversity et al., *Perspectives on Biodiversity. Valuing its Role in an Everchanging World*, Washington 1999, p. 65.

Each traditional landscape expresses a unique sense or spirit of place (*genius loci*) that helps to define its identity<sup>44</sup>.

This ideal of a unique cultural landscape is based on cultural theories and philosophies of history formulated around 1800. These had been directed against the universalism of the Enlightenment, according to which a timeless human reason will, and should prevail in the course of history so that the same civilization spreads throughout the world<sup>45</sup>. According to Johann Gottfried Herder, probably the most influential proponent of such Enlightenmentcritical antiuniversalist theories, the goal of human history consists in the development of unique forms of culture all over the world, each of which has a unique, historically developed reason, organization, and humannature relationship. Notabene, uniqueness does not mean that a culture differs in some arbitrary way from all other cultures but that a people has shaped its culture in a way that is appropriate to its particular circumstances. The cultures or nations should modify themselves »according to place, time and their inner character«<sup>46</sup>, whilst the two developmental principles – first the »character« or »genius of a people«, second the special natural conditions, which Herder subsumes under the term »climate« of that »stretch of the earth« that serves as the people's »dwelling place« – interact in an organic process: Cultures develop reasonably if and only if each people sensitively grasps the special natural possibilities of its place and realizes these possibilities according to its specific character. Thereby, the »climate« shapes the character of the people: their physique, sensuality, and »way of feeling« and, thus, their »way of thinking«. Thereby, the people change the »climate« of their dwelling place by shaping it according to natural requirements. Nature and people modify and shape each other reciprocally and, as a result of their common history, conflate into a unique, »organic« unity of »land and people« – as the conservative folklorist and cultural critic Wilhelm Heinrich Riehl<sup>47</sup> later called it. This organic unity

44 Marc ANTROP, Why landscapes of the past are important for the future, in: *Landscape and Urban Planning* 70/1–2 (2005), pp. 21–34, at p. 27.

45 The following presentation is based on Ulrich EISEL, Individualität als Einheit der konkreten Natur. Das Kulturkonzept der Geographie, in: Bernhard GLAESER / Parto TEHERANI-KROENNER (eds.), *Humanökologie und Kulturökologie: Grundlagen, Ansätze, Praxis*, Opladen 1992, pp. 107–151; Isaiah BERLIN, Three Critics of the Enlightenment. Vico, Hamann, Herder, Princeton 2000; Thomas KIRCHHOFF, Räumliche Eigenart. Sinn und Herkunft einer zentralen Denkfigur im Naturschutz, in: *Schriftenreihe der TLUG* 103 (2012), pp. 11–22; id., »Kulturelle Ökosystemdienstleistungen«. Eine begriffliche und methodische Kritik, Freiburg 2018, pp. 60–64.

46 HERDER, *Sämtliche Werke*, vol. XIV, p. 227, my translation.

47 Wilhelm Heinrich RIEHL, *Die Naturgeschichte des Volkes als Grundlage einer deutschen Social-Politik*, Erster Band: Land und Leute, Stuttgart 1854, p. IX.

manifests itself in a cultural landscape with diversely differentiated, unique forms of land use that are adapted to the natural conditions of the area and therefore permanently useful. In today's terminology, one would probably say that the successful coevolutionary development of social and ecological systems has led to unique sustainable and resilient socioecological systems.

Regarding later racism, two points should be emphasized: First, contrary to widespread misinterpretations, Herder conceives of peoples not as biological, but as linguistically and culturally united communities. Second, Herder categorically excludes any hegemony of one culture over another; every culture or nation »carries within itself the equal measure of its perfection, incomparable with others«<sup>48</sup>.

The concept of unique landscapes represents a sacralization of nature because unique landscapes represent a comprehensive instance of meaning and superordinate totality that cannot be questioned, to which every member of the people is committed and should strive to act in loyalty.

### 3.7 Nationalist and racist sacralization of German forests

At the beginning of the 19th century, German nationalists stylized German forests into patriotic temples<sup>49</sup>. This linking of forests and German Nation was motivated by a political consciousness shaped by the aftermath of the French Revolution, the dissolution of the Holy Roman Empire during the Napoleonic Wars in 1806, Napoleon's occupation policy, and the German Wars of Liberation against France between 1813 and 1815. In this situation, German forests were elevated into a symbol and alleged fact of German historical and cultural identity, serving to demarcate Germany from France. Especially oak forests were regarded as patriotic temples, which had survived the storm of ancient history and in which shining light announced a new age – at least in paintings like *Eichenwald bei Querum (Oak Forest near Querum)* by Johann Friedrich Weitsch (about 1800) and *Auf Vorposten (On Picquet)* by Georg Friedrich Kersting (1815).

The Nazi Regime and its ideological vanguard transformed this view of German forests into the fatal racialized myth of the »Eternal German Forest« and the »Eternal German People« that involved a double sacralization of German forests: first as eternal, second as the place where the alleged superiority of the alleged »Germanic race« has been shaped. In this sense, Walther Schoenichen claimed:

<sup>48</sup> HERDER, *Sämtliche Werke*, vol. XIV, p. 227, my translation.

<sup>49</sup> For details see Jeffrey K. WILSON, *The German Forest. Nature, Identity, and the Contestation of a National Symbol, 1871–1914*, Toronto 2012.

Since time immemorial, German man has been linked to the German forest by indissoluble bonds. [...] The heroic spirit of Germanic warriors has always been steeled and strengthened anew in the wilderness of the rugged tree shapes. A hardened race grew up here – generations of leaders, destined and qualified to control the fate of the world<sup>50</sup>.

Consequently, the alleged »Germanic race« was purportedly not only capable of, but indeed obliged to expand and conquer. Similarly, Hermann Göring stated: »We have now become accustomed to seeing the German people as eternal. There is no better image for it than the forest, which remains eternal and will remain eternal. Eternal forest and eternal people, they belong together«<sup>51</sup>. Thus, the »German Forest« became a symbol and a medium for the sacralization of the German people and the German nation. Further, the »German Forest« was interpreted in National Socialism as an exemplary biotic community: The alleged natural hierarchical structure of the »German Forest« became a model for the organization of the »German *Volksgemeinschaft*«.

### 3.8 Scientific sacralization of nature as optimal self-organizing ecosystem

Extra-religious sacralizations of nature have developed in modern Western cultures even there where they are at least expected: in the natural sciences, especially in certain organismic currents of ecosystem theory. Notabene, for a start, ecosystem theory – compared to classical synecology – represents a further step in the modern objectification and demystification of nature where nature is conceived as a causal system determined by flows of materials and energy, wherein the different species – whose unique ecological relationships were the main subject of classical synecology – become replaceable function carriers<sup>52</sup>. However, according to organismic ecosystem theories, the biosphere naturally – i. e., as long as it is not impaired by humans – consists of self-organizing ecosystems that have achieved, in the course of millions of years of evolutionary history, a level of organization that categorically transcends that of all human-made agricultural and technical systems in terms of complexity, stability, and efficiency<sup>53</sup>.

50 Walther SCHOENICHEN, *Urwaldwildnis in deutschen Landen. Bilder vom Kampf des deutschen Menschen mit der Urlandschaft*, Neudamm 1934, p. 51, my translation.

51 Cited after Erich GRITZBACH (ed.), *Hermann Göring. Reden und Aufsätze*, München 1938, p. 111, my translation.

52 Kurt JAX, *Ecology, III. Ecosystems*, in: John Baird CALLICOTT/Robert FRODEMAN (eds.), *Encyclopedia of Environmental Ethics and Philosophy*, vol. 1, Detroit 2009, pp. 251–255.

53 For details and alternative ecological theories, see Thomas KIRCHHOFF et al., *The one-sidedness and cultural bias of the resilience approach*, in: *Gaia* 19/1 (2010),

Barry Commoner, one of the leaders in the modern US-American environmental movement, has famously summed up this view in the phrase »Nature Knows Best«, which he has deemed a »Law of Ecology«<sup>54</sup>. Correspondingly, environmental economist David Rapport has asserted that »[n]atural evolution of ecosystems represents the best of all possible worlds«<sup>55</sup>. Especially in North America, such natural ecosystems were emotionally connected with forest wilderness<sup>56</sup>. In nature conservation and environmental management, they were accredited with the property of ecosystem integrity, i. e., »the capability of supporting and maintaining a balanced, integrated, adaptive community of organisms having a species composition, diversity, and functional organization comparable to that of natural habitat of the region«<sup>57</sup>. The conservation of natural ecosystems that exhibit ecosystem integrity was – and still is – widely regarded as the necessary requirement to overcome the stated ecological crisis and to secure the long-term survival of humanity because such natural ecosystems represent »the ultimate resource upon which man depends«<sup>58</sup>. Similarly but more universally, the Gaia hypothesis states that the whole Earth naturally represents a self-regulating living system beyond human control<sup>59</sup>.

pp. 25–32; id. / Annette VOIGT, Rekonstruktion der Geschichte der Synökologie. Konkurrierende Paradigmen, Transformationen, kulturelle Hintergründe, in: Verhandlungen zur Geschichte und Theorie der Biologie 15 (2010), pp. 181–196; Thomas KIRCHHOFF, Konkurrierende Naturkonzepte in der Ökologie, ihre kulturellen Hintergründe und ihre Konsequenzen für das Ökosystemmanagement, in: Elisabeth GRAEBSCHMIDT (ed.), Was heißt Natur? Philosophischer Ort und Begründungsfunktion des Naturbegriffs, Leipzig 2015, pp. 175–194.

54 Barry COMMONER, *The Closing Circle. Nature, Man and Technology*, New York 1971, p. 41.

55 David J. RAPPORT, *Answering to critics*, in: Id. et al. (eds.), *Ecosystem Health. Principles and Practice*, Malden 1998, pp. 41–50, at p. 46.

56 See e.g., Laura WESTRA, *An Environmental Proposal for Ethics. The Principle of Integrity*, Lanham 1994. For details see NASH, *Wilderness and the American Mind*; Thomas KIRCHHOFF, *Die Konzepte der Ökosystemgesundheit und Ökosystemintegrität. Zur Frage und Fragwürdigkeit normativer Setzungen in der Ökologie*, in: *Natur und Landschaft* 91/9–10 (2016), URL: <<https://doi.org/10.17433/9.2016.50153417.464-469>> (06-12-2023), pp. 464–469; id., »Ökosystemintegrität« – ein geeignetes umweltethisches Leitprinzip? / »Ecosystem integrity« – an appropriate principle for environmental ethics?, in: *Zeitschrift für Praktische Philosophie* 7 (2020), pp. 191–220, URL: <<https://doi.org/10.22613/zfpp/7.2.8>> (06-12-2023).

57 James R. KARR / Daniel R. DUDLEY, *Ecological perspective on water quality goals*, in: *Environmental Management* 5 (1981), pp. 55–68, at p. 56.

58 *Ibid.*; cf. WESTRA, *An Environmental Proposal for Ethics*. For an analysis of different concepts of ecosystem integrity see KIRCHHOFF, »Ökosystemintegrität«.

59 For a critical discussion of the Gaia hypothesis see George C. WILLIAMS, *Gaia, nature worship and biocentric fallacies*, in: *The Quarterly Review of Biology* 67/4 (1992), pp. 479–486.



These theories represent a twofold science-based sacralization of nature: First, nature is sacralized by attributing to it an ecological organization that is optimal and transcends the scope of human scientific analysis, computability, and technical construction. Natural ecosystems function beyond human control and even controllability and, therefore, should be objects of human »ecological awe«. Thereby, the transition from the realm of scientific knowledge to that which remains hidden from it is marked by the transition from the finite to the infinite or unlimited complexity. Second, nature is sacralized by claiming that humans must preserve the (remnant) natural ecosystems if they are to survive in the long term, whereby two main approaches can be distinguished: Either to keep as much nature as possible apart from culture as wilderness untrammelled by humans, or to reintegrate human life into nature<sup>60</sup>. In both cases, nature in the form of perfect ecosystems and an all-encompassing Gaia, provides the norms we have to follow.

Thus, nature is sacralized in structurally the same way as in Christian concepts of divine nature. This is particularly obvious in Rapport's above cited statement that »[n]atural evolution of ecosystems represents the best of all possible worlds« which, probably unconsciously, mimics Leibniz's statement that the factual world is the best of all possible worlds. Notabene, God's unlimited wisdom, goodness, and power has been replaced by nature's unlimited power of selforganization by natural selection.

### 3.9 Spiritual »ecological« sacralization of nature: deep ecology, peace with nature and ecospirituality

The above scientific-ecological sacralization of nature has been criticized from within the ecology-movement as well. The Norwegian philosopher Arne Næss<sup>61</sup> has criticized it as »shallow ecology« that is anthropocentric und eco-technocratic. Instead, he called for a spiritual »deep ecology« that ascribes to the earthly ecosystem and the entire diversity of life on earth an absolute intrinsic value independent of its usefulness for humans<sup>62</sup>. Similarly, the German physicist and philosopher Klaus Michael Meyer-Abich demanded to respect nature as co-world (*Mitwelt*) instead of environment (*Umwelt*) and to make peace with nature (*Frieden mit der Natur*)<sup>63</sup>. These views of nature

60 I would like to thank Bernhard Gissibl, who suggested this differentiation.

61 Arne NÆSS, The shallow and the deep, long-range ecology movements. A summary, in: *Inquiry* 16 (1973), pp. 95–100.

62 Bron TAYLOR, Earth and nature-based spirituality (Part I): from deep ecology to radical environmentalism, in: *Religion* 31/2 (2001), pp. 175–193, at pp. 179–183.

63 Klaus Michael MEYER-ABICH, *Wege zum Frieden mit der Natur. Praktische Naturphilosophie für die Umweltpolitik*, München 1984.

do not only recognize nature as a moral subject but also include the esoteric and physiocentric assumption that humans can be truly human not in human society but only in natural communion with animals and plants, wind and water, heaven and earth<sup>64</sup>. Since the 2000s, similar views have been expressed under the label »ecospirituality«. This movement is characterized by the perception of nature as a personified entity with »maternal« traits that must be guarded and venerated against evil »male« technical dominion and exploitation; by ideas of a spiritual connection between human beings and nature; by the awareness of nature as a sacred entity<sup>65</sup>. In similar ways but with different intention, namely with a focus on gender critique, ecofeminism explores the connections between women and nature in economy, religion, politics, literature etc. and addresses the parallels between the oppression of nature and the oppression of women<sup>66</sup>.

In these conceptions, nature is sacralized in a threefold way: as a moral subject, as an all-encompassing point of reference for human self-realization, and in that the destruction of the original (allegedly) paradisiacal ecological community of humans and nature is interpreted as a fall of humankind. This modern sacralization of nature differs fundamentally from the animism of ethnic communities: It is no longer about forces that reside in individual natural phenomena to which one must engage in behavior but about nature as a whole, so that – instead of the distinction between true and false belief – the distinction between the natural and the unnatural serves as the moral guideline<sup>67</sup>.

### 3.10 Scientific ecological de-sacralization of nature: flux of nature

Organicist views of nature or, more specifically, the biosphere as consisting of optimal selforganizing ecosystems dominated scientific ecology until the 1960s. Nowadays they are widely regarded as disproved in scientific ecology – »no one would now defend a view of functional organization of com-

64 Id., *Bedingungen des Friedens mit der Natur*, in: Jörg CALLIESS/Reinhold E. LOB (eds.), *Praxis der Umwelt- und Friedenserziehung*, Bd. 1: Grundlagen, Düsseldorf 1987, pp. 710–718, at p. 711.

65 Valerie LINCOLN, *Ecospirituality: A pattern that connects*, in: *Journal of Holistic Nursing* 18/3 (2000), pp. 227–244; TAYLOR, *Earth and nature-based spirituality*.

66 See e. g., Françoise d'EAUBONNE, *Le Féminisme ou la Mort*, Paris 1974; Susan GRIFFIN, *Women and Nature. The Roaring Inside Her*, New York 1978; Carolyn MERCHANT, *The Death of Nature: Women, Ecology, and the Scientific Revolution*, San Francisco 1980; Greta GAARD/Lori GRUEN, *Ecofeminism. Toward Global Justice and Planetary Health*, in: *Society and Nature* 2/1 (1993), pp. 1–35; Maria MIES/Vandana SHIVA, *Ecofeminism*, London 1993.

67 Cf. BIRNBACHER, *Naturalness*.

munities modeled on the functional organization of organisms«<sup>68</sup>, »there is no thus thing as an integrated, equilibria, homeostatic ecosystem: It is a myth«<sup>69</sup> – but have remained influential in the environmental movement, in nature conservation, in the Anthropocene discourse, etc.<sup>70</sup>. In scientific ecology, the biosphere, even in the absence of human »disturbances«, is now understood as an interactive multiplicity of different species that individualistically interact with each other in complex ways but do not form functionally closed communities but rather open communities that change continuously in space and time. There is no balance of nature but a flux of nature, there are no optimal natural systems<sup>71</sup>. In this scientific perspective, nature once again loses all its connotations of sacredness.

### 3.11 Neo-pagan sacralization of nature

The neopagan movement has emerged since the end of the 1960s, initially foremost in the context of the ecology movement, and gained considerable popularity in many modern Western societies<sup>72</sup>. European neo-paganism builds on the pagan tradition in European history, namely the specific empathy with religious feelings and ideas of classical antiquity among many humanistic intellectuals<sup>73</sup>. It emerged as a reaction to the perception of a fundamental

68 James MACLAURIN / Kim STERELNY, *What is Biodiversity?*, Chicago 2008, p. 114; cf. Mark SAGOFF, *What does environmental protection protect?*, in: *Ethics, Policy & Environment* 16 (2013), pp. 239–257, at p. 246.

69 Robert V. O'NEILL, *Is it time to bury the ecosystem concept? (With full military honors, of course!)*, in: *Ecology* 82/12 (2001), pp. 3275–3284, at p. 3276.

70 See KIRCHHOFF, »Kulturelle Ökosystemdienstleistungen«, pp. 81–83; id., *Einführung. Von der Ökologie als Wissenschaft zur ökologischen Weltanschauung*, in: *Natur und Landschaft* 95/9–10 (2020), pp. 390–396.

71 Cf. Daniel B. BOTKIN, *Discordant Harmonies. A New Ecology for the Twenty-First Century*, Oxford 1990; Steward T. A. PICKETT / Richard S. OSTFELD, *The shifting paradigm in ecology*, in: Richard L. KNIGHT / Sarah F. BATES (eds.), *A New Century for Natural Resources Management*, Washington 1995, pp. 261–278; KIRCHHOFF / VOIGT, *Rekonstruktion der Geschichte der Synökologie*; KIRCHHOFF, »Kulturelle Ökosystemdienstleistungen«; id., *Community-level biodiversity: an inquiry into the ecological and cultural background and practical consequences of opposing concepts*, in: Dirk LANZERATH / Minou FRIELE (eds.), *Concepts and Values in Biodiversity*, London 2014; pp. 99–119; Thomas KIRCHHOFF, *The myth of Frederic Clements's mutualistic organicism, or: on the necessity to distinguish different concepts of organicism*, in: *History and Philosophy of the Life Sciences* 42 (2020), article 24, URL: <<https://doi.org/10.1007/s40656-020-00317-y>> (06-12-2023).

72 Marc R. SPINDLER, *Europe's neo-paganism. A perverse inculturation*, in: *International Bulletin of Missionary Research* 11/1 (1987), pp. 8–11; Kathryn ROUNTREE, *Neo-paganism, animism, and kinship with nature*, in: *Journal of Contemporary Religion* 27/2 (2012), pp. 305–320.

73 SPINDLER, *Europe's neo-paganism*, p. 8.

crisis of the ideologies that had so far inspired the life of Europeans, and to feelings of disappointment and despair – seeking to provide a new meaning of life and culture<sup>74</sup>. The neo-paganism criticizes key ideas and values, which it regards as the basis of his crisis:

the high value placed on »progress«, materialism, and consumerism; familiar dualisms, such as animate/inanimate, body/spirit, mind/body, natural/supernatural, nature/culture; and the belief that humans are categorically different from, and superior to, all other species and possess a God-given right to dominate and exploit the environment for human gain and pleasure<sup>75</sup>.

In particular, neopaganism is opposed to the Judeo-Christian traditions, which are accused of desacralizing nature and the entire universe, of depriving the world of all immanent sources of enthusiasm<sup>76</sup> and the people from having a religious approach to nature. The French writer Louis Pauwels aptly characterized the core of neopaganism and its relationship to Christianity as follows:

Paganism postulates [...] that the sacred is within reach of human existence. So, it is not the same as atheism or agnosticism; however, it refuses the one God, out there, beyond the world, and yet jealous, who forbids creatures from having spiritual experience aimed at human beings in their relations with the world. The one God requires from people a conscience of being exiled. Paganism seeks religion in our exalted feeling of wholeness here and now. Far from desacralising the world, it sacralises it. Indeed: it takes the world for sacred<sup>77</sup>.

The main positive characteristic of neo-paganism is that its adherents – drawing on pre-Christian and non-Christian beliefs – want to live a nature-religious and experiential religiosity. Its first principle, as formulated by the international Pagan Federation, is: »Love for and Kinship with Nature. Reverence for the life force and its ever-renewing cycles of life and death«<sup>78</sup>. »Kinship« is used here to express the conviction that, first, the relationships of human beings with other beings are essentially in the order of familial relationships and that, second, the natural, supernatural and human social worlds

74 Ibid.

75 ROUNTREE, Neo-paganism, at p. 306; COOPER et al., Aesthetic and spiritual values of ecosystems, p. 223.

76 SPINDLER, Europe's neo-paganism, p. 8.

77 Louis PAUWELS, *Le droit de parler*, Paris 1981, at p. 295, cited according to SPINDLER, Europe's neo-paganism, p. 9.

78 Pagan Federation, published by Pagan Federation International, URL: <<https://www.paganfederation.org/about-the-pf/>> (06-12-2023).

are neither separate from nor models for / of one another but constitute one indivisible sacred world<sup>79</sup>. Deities are worshipped in nature, especially trees and forests are considered sacred. Nature as a whole is revered as »the great mother« who gives birth to and brings forth everything. Individual experiences of nature should lead to an expansion of consciousness, to the awareness of the harmonious unity with nature and the whole world. Every human being is said to be able to experience this divine nature and world, without the help of any mediating expert. Accordingly, the second neopagan principle is a »positive morality, in which the individual is responsible for the discovery and development of their true nature in harmony with the outer world and community«<sup>80</sup>. Like the followers of the ecology movement, the followers of neo-paganism seek a life »in harmony with nature«, yet not with the help of scientific knowledge<sup>81</sup> but based on individual religious experience of nature. »Above all, the very thrust of neopaganism is against rational analysis and in favor of mythical, passionate expression«<sup>82</sup>.

It should not go unmentioned that some currents of the neopagan movements are close to or even belong to ethnic-populist, *völkisch* and radical right-wing movements<sup>83</sup>. However, many neo-pagan movements that call for the realization of ethnic uniqueness against the universalism of Enlightenment and Christianity or national and supranational confederations are structurally more akin to Herder's non-racist theory, e. g., many forms of the Baltic neopaganism<sup>84</sup>.

### 3.12 Sacralization of forests as solidary communities

The last type of sacralization of nature that I would like to address has been expressed quite recently by foresters like Erwin Thoma<sup>85</sup> and Peter Wohlleben in an international best-selling book<sup>86</sup>. In an obviously anthropomorphizing

79 ROUNTREE, Neo-paganism, pp. 305f.

80 Pagan Federation, published by Pagan Federation International.

81 See KIRCHHOFF, Von der Ökologie als Wissenschaft zur ökologischen Weltanschauung.

82 SPINDLER, Europe's neo-paganism, p. 8.

83 Neuheidendum, published by EZW, Evangelische Zentralstelle für Weltanschauungsfragen, URL: <<https://www.ezw-berlin.de/publikationen/lexikon/neuheidendum/>> (06-12-2023).

84 Victor A. SHNIRELMAN, »Christians! Go home«. A revival of neo-paganism between the Baltic Sea and Transcaucasia (An overview), in: Journal of Contemporary Religion 17/2 (2002), pp. 197–211; Robert A. SAUNDERS, Pagan places. Towards a religiogeography of neopaganism, in: Progress in Human Geography 37/6 (2013), pp. 786–810.

85 Erwin THOMA, Die geheime Sprache der Bäume. Die Wunder des Waldes für uns entschlüsselt, Salzburg 2012.

86 Peter WOHLLEBEN, The Hidden Life of Trees. What They Feel, How They Communicate – Discoveries from a Secret World, Vancouver 2016.

description, Thoma and Wohlleben both depict natural forests – in distinction to humanmade forests – as solidary communities, in which the individual trees support each other in their existence. According to Wohlleben even dead trees remain included in this mutually supportive community as is shown by the fact that the stumps of felled trees, maintaining connection to the living trees through their roots, are able to form a protecting bark over the cut. Thoma speaks of »the infinite forests of the earth« that »show us the concept of the perfect circular economy«<sup>87</sup>.

This sacralization of forests resembles the earlier sacralizations of nature as organismlike superecosystem; however, the sacralized community no longer consists of all the different species living in the same place but is essentially limited to the individuals of a single species – indicating a clear shift from organic unity by division of labor across species to solidarity by sharing among congenerics. This new sacralization of forests met with astonishing resonance, which might be the expression of a growing »unease in culture«: Forests, as stable communities of solidarity, represent a moral counter-world to a society that is perceived as increasingly individualistic, lacking in solidarity, and changing ever faster<sup>88</sup>.

#### 4. Conclusion: Nature, a pivotal subject-matter of sacralization in modern Western societies – even in the »Anthropocene«

My analysis demonstrates that the cultural history of nature in Western societies – contrary to early theories of modernization and secularization – is not a history of the disappearance but rather a history of ever new kinds of sacralizations of nature. Whereas intra-religious sacralizations of nature might have lost importance throughout the last centuries<sup>89</sup>, extra-religious sacralizations of nature have remained widespread and might even have gained importance. Obviously, after the »death of God« (Friedrich Nietzsche) and the Enlightenment beliefs in a rational progressive history of humankind have vanished, too, nature has become a pivotal subject-matter of sacralization for many people in modern Western societies. »At the end of the modern age, a paradigm

87 THOMA, *Die geheime Sprache der Bäume*, p. 7, my translation.

88 Thomas KIRCHHOFF, *Sehnsucht nach Wald als Wildnis*, in: *Aus Politik und Zeitgeschichte* 67/49–50 (2017), pp. 17–24, at p. 24, URL: <<http://www.bpb.de/apuz/260678/sehnsucht-nach-wald-als-wildnis>> (06-12-2023).

89 But see the greening-of-religion hypothesis (Bron TAYLOR et al., Lynn White Jr. and the greening-of-religion hypothesis, in: *Conservation Biology* 30/5 (2016), pp. 1000–1009). Cf. the examples of religious naturalism, Dark Green Religion or creation-theological ethics of nature given in the introduction.

shift is unmistakably taking place: from the history of progress, whose aporias are coming to light, to the horizon of meaning of nature«<sup>90</sup>.

This new significance of nature in the form of its multiple sacralizations is hardly surprising considering that nature is, by definition, predisposed to be sacralized. This potential becomes obvious if the concept of »nature« is not understood ontological as the epitome of a certain class of objects given per se but as a concept of reflection that refers to our judgments about something<sup>91</sup>. Then, nature becomes recognizable as what is culturally perceived as a counter-world to the world of culture and technology<sup>92</sup>, as what is attributed with nondisposability as against disposable technology and conditionally disposable culture<sup>93</sup>, whereby this non-disposability can consist in a perceived freedom from cultural and technological constraints and regimes as well as in the assumption of an ideal beyond cultural and technological regimes<sup>94</sup>. In this reflection-theoretical sense, nature structurally transcends the realm of the human and lends itself to collective and individual human experiences of selftranscendence<sup>95</sup>.

In the light of this reflection-theoretical definition of nature, it becomes clear: The criterion for whether or not an »end of nature« has occurred with the advent of the »area of the Anthropocene« cannot lie in the extent of human changes to the physical environment, ecosystems, the biosphere, the climate, etc. Rather, the only decisive factor is whether something physical is still perceived as a counter-world to the world of culture and technology. The omnipresence of human influences on nature does neither imply an »end of nature«, nor would it create impossible sacralizations of nature. In fact, the opposite seems to be the case. What do these reflections on sacralized nature imply for environmental ethics? By no means, they imply that nature should be imbued with physiocentric value and, thus, be considered sacred in itself, as many conservationists demand in order to overcome the diagnosed ecological crisis. Rather, these reflections suggest to take sacralizations of nature seriously as one of several influential culturally shaped anthropocentric values of nature. These are characteristic of modern Western cultures in their

90 RAUH, *Heilige Wildnis*, p. 12, my translation.

91 Christoph HUBIG, »Natur« und »Kultur«. Von Inbegriffen zu Reflexionsbegriffen, in: *Zeitschrift für Kulturphilosophie* 5/1 (2011), pp. 97–119.

92 Götz GROSSKLAUS/Ernst OLDEMEYER (eds.), *Natur als Gegenwelt. Beiträge zur Kulturgeschichte der Natur*, Karlsruhe 1983; KIRCHHOFF, »Natur« als kulturelles Konzept; KIRCHHOFF/VICENZOTTI, A historical and systematic survey of European perceptions of wilderness, p. 444.

93 HUBIG, »Natur« und »Kultur«.

94 KIRCHHOFF, *Sehnsucht nach Wald als Wildnis*.

95 Cf. Kay MILTON, Nature is already sacred, in: *Environmental Values* 8/4 (1999), pp. 437–449.

ambivalence towards culture and technology, which are valued and critically viewed at the same time. The values of nature are manifested in different forms of appreciations – one of these forms being different types of sacralization – of different natural phenomena that are appreciated with respect to different attributes, which refer to ideals of freedom or ideals of order.

If this reflection-theoretical reconstruction of (concepts and evaluations of) nature, culture, and technology is applied to the recent Anthropocene discourse, there is an alternative to the dichotomy observable in many debates about the Anthropocene<sup>96</sup>, i. e., a dichotomy that pits sacralizations of nature against sacralizations of technology: On the one hand, nature is regarded as an object of total human control and order that will lead to a »good Anthropocene«<sup>97</sup> if, in ecomodernist perspective, this control is performed in a sustainable manner. On the other hand, nature is regarded as a system, into which humanity has to reintegrate itself, a reintegration that should lead to the abandonment of the nature-culture distinction and to overcome the »Anthropocene« in favor of, e. g., a »symbiocene«<sup>98</sup>. Thereby, both alternatives conceive of nature in terms of an ontological realism as an observer-independent object. The reflection-theoretical alternative consists in reconstructing both of these alternatives as interdependent social constructions and evaluations of nature. This reflection-theoretical perspective shifts the reference point of the entire discussion: It is not about the relation of humans to a nature per se but about the relationships – including power relationships – between competing cultural patterns of interpretation, economic interests, etc. which are addressed, among others, in political ecology<sup>99</sup>. Thus, the »ecological crisis« – which in the light of the demand for a different human conception of and human relationship to nature appears as an irresponsible destruction of nature per se – turns out to be primarily an irresponsible destruction of the natural

96 For an analysis of this dichotomy see Clive HAMILTON, The theodicy of the »good anthropocene«, in: *Environmental Humanities* 7/1 (2016), pp. 233–238; Frank ADLOFF/Iris HILBRICH, Practices of sustainability and the enactment of their natures/cultures. Ecosystem services, rights of nature, and geoengineering, in: *Social Science Information* 60/2 (2021), pp. 168–187; Simon DALBY, Framing the Anthropocene: The good, the bad and the ugly, in: *The Anthropocene Review* 3/1 (2016), pp. 33–51.

97 Erle C. ELLIS, The planet of no return, in: *Breakthrough Journal* 2 (2011), pp. 37–44.

98 Glenn A. ALBRECHT, Exiting the anthropocene and entering the symbiocene, in: *Minding Nature* 9/2 (2016), pp. 12–16; Susan L. PRESCOTT/Alan C. LOGAN, Down to earth. Planetary health and biophilosophy in the symbiocene epoch, in: *Challenges* 8/2 (2017), p. 19, URL: <<https://doi.org/10.3390/challe8020019>> (06-12-2023).

99 For a characterization of political ecology see e. g., James B. GREENBERG/Thomas K. PARK, Political ecology, in: *Journal of Political Ecology* 1 (1994), pp. 1–12; Raymond L. BRYANT/Sinéad BAILEY, *Third World Political Ecology. An Introduction*, London/New York 1997; Matthias SCHMIDT, Politische Ökologie, in: *Natur und Landschaft* 95/9–10 (2020), pp. 418–424.



environment by people with less power by people with more power; environmental problems turn out to be the result of local as well as global intra- and intergenerational environmental injustice, which is enabled and perpetuated by the prevailing global and local power relationships among people<sup>100</sup>.

100 Thomas KIRCHHOFF, Eignet sich die Naturauffassung und Naturethik der Enzyklika *Laudato si'* als Basis für einen alle Menschen einbeziehenden Dialog über die Lösung der globalen Umweltprobleme?, in: FORUM WARE 44 (2017) pp. 7–19, p. 15; id., Naturbeziehungen in Zeiten zoonotischer Pandemien. Über gute Nähe und kluge Distanz, in: Benjamin HELD et al. (eds.), *Coronafolgenforschung*, Heidelberg 2022, pp. 45–95, at p. 77, URL: <<https://doi.org/10.11588/heibooks.1049.c14578>> (06-12-2023).



Bernhard Gissibl

## Wilderness, Deep Evolution, Circle of Life

### Sacralizing the Serengeti

Ever since the Anthropocene has been put forward as a designation to name a distinct new geological epoch, it has been more than just a label for a chronological problem to be solved by stratigraphers or the Earth System Sciences. Suggested to denote an age following the Holocene, in which humans have become a »global geophysical force«<sup>1</sup>, the Anthropocene has become a convenient shorthand for the multiple processes of anthropogenic ecological change that add up to the present environmental crisis. Additionally, the Anthropocene has provoked cross-disciplinary debates about the histories, agencies, and responsibilities of the detrimental human impact on the Earth System and global biodiversity<sup>2</sup>. Take, for example, the widespread equation of the Anthropocene with the »end of nature«<sup>3</sup>. If human impact has been so pervasive as to alter even the most fundamental geophysical and ecological processes, then there is no place left for autonomous nature beyond the human reach. In the Anthropocene world nature and culture have become inseparable. It is a hybrid world, with »no single Nature or mode of Natural knowledge to which environmentalists can make recourse«<sup>4</sup>.

The »end« of Nature spelt by the Anthropocene echoes earlier controversies surrounding the long dominant paradigm of wilderness as the preferred

- 1 Will STEFFEN et al., The Anthropocene: Are Humans now Overwhelming the Great Forces of Nature?, in: *Ambio* 36/8 (2007), pp. 614–621.
- 2 For helpful introductions into the field see Helmuth TRISCHLER, The Anthropocene – A Challenge for the History of Science, Technology, and the Environment, in: *NTM: Zeitschrift für Geschichte der Wissenschaften, Technik und Medizin* 24/3 (2016), pp. 309–335; Eva HORN / Hannes BERGTHALLER, *Anthropozän zur Einführung*, Hamburg 32022.
- 3 For a recent critical discussion of this assumption, see Keje BOERSMA, The Anthropocene as the End of Nature?, in: *Environmental Ethics* 44/3 (2022), pp. 195–219. Both the phrase and the link between anthropogenic climate change and the end of nature as an independent force are usually credited to Bill McKIBBEN, *The End of Nature*, New York 1989.
- 4 Jamie LORIMER, *Wildlife in the Anthropocene. Conservation after Nature*, Minneapolis / London 2015, p. 2.

kind of nature to be preserved in protected areas<sup>5</sup>. Indeed, the Anthropocene diagnosis has triggered a new »great conservation debate«<sup>6</sup> in which the most divisive issue once more constitutes the prevalent idea of Nature<sup>7</sup>. So-called new conservationists and, more recently, convivial conservationists embrace the Anthropocene challenge to think and practice »nature« beyond established dichotomies and boundaries, whereas »mainstream« conservationists or »neoprotectionists« warn that the conceptual abolishment of independent nature would entail even more harmful consequences for already threatened species and ecosystems. In their eyes the Anthropocene is a potentially dangerous »catchword« for the exaggerated claim that »nowhere on Earth is natural« and humans have allegedly altered everything<sup>8</sup>. Abandoning the idea of »intact ecosystems«<sup>9</sup> would not only undermine the legitimacy of existing protected areas but open the floodgates for indiscriminate human interference with species assemblages and what nature is left, including »accelerated changes in land use motivated by profit«<sup>10</sup>. Accordingly, neoprotectionists not only champion the traditional conservationist ideal of preserving wilderness and natural ecosystems within protected areas but also campaign for the extension of the protected area estate in order to safeguard the remnants of relative intact »original« nature from further human encroachment.

### 1. »A Place like no other«: The Serengeti and Anthropocene Conservation

Enter the Serengeti. As a National Park of world renown, the Serengeti has played and continues to play a critical role in such debates. Situated in North-western Tanzania and reaching into Southern Kenya, the Serengeti-Mara ecosystem comprises approximately 25,000 square kilometers of grasslands,

- 5 For surveys see J. Baird CALLICOTT / Michael P. NELSON (eds.), *The Great New Wilderness Debate*, Athens 1998, and id. (eds.), *The Wilderness Debate Rages on. Continuing the Great New Wilderness Debate*, Athens 2008.
- 6 Bram BUESCHER / Robert FLETCHER, *The Conservation Revolution. Radical Ideas for saving Nature beyond the Anthropocene*, London 2020, p. 13.
- 7 Helpful surveys that chart the controversies can be found at *ibid.*, pp. 13–46; and George HOLMES, *What do we talk about when we talk about Biodiversity Conservation in the Anthropocene?*, in: *Environment and Society* 6 (2015), pp. 87–108.
- 8 Tim CARO et al., *Conservation in the Anthropocene*, in: *Conservation Biology* 26/1 (2012), pp. 185–188, at p. 185.
- 9 »Intact ecosystems« or »relative ecological integrity« are often used as the post-Anthropocene synonyms for wilderness, see e.g., James R. ALLAN et al., *The Extraordinary Value of Wilderness Areas in the Anthropocene*, in: Michael I. GOLDSTEIN / Dominick A. DELLA SALA (eds.), *Encyclopedia of the World's Biomes*, Amsterdam 2020, pp. 158–168, URL: <<https://doi.org/10.1016/B978-0-12-409548-9.12427-3>> (06-05-2023).
- 10 CARO et al., *Conservation in the Anthropocene*, p. 185.

plain savanna, and open woodlands. With around 15,000 square kilometres the Serengeti National Park forms the extensive core of this ecosystem, whose geographical extent, uniqueness, and world-famous status are defined first and foremost by the seasonal movements of far over a million wildebeest, zebra, and smaller herds of other antelopes who follow the seasonal availability of grass and water. These movements are commonly held to constitute the largest terrestrial animal migration in the world<sup>11</sup>. Virtually all of the Serengeti-Mara-Ecosystem is under some form of conservation status, with the Serengeti National Park being inscribed in the UNESCO list of World Heritage Sites since 1981. Thanks to the strict preservation practiced within its boundaries, the Serengeti sustains the largest concentrations of ungulates and large predators anywhere in the world today. Wildlife tourism industry and conservation NGOs market this spectacle as »The Great Migration«.

Conservation biologists who have conducted long-time ecological and behavioural research of the Serengeti's wildlife count among the most articulate defenders of the traditional protected area-approach<sup>12</sup>. This is particularly true for Anthony R. E. Sinclair, who emerged as perhaps the most prolific conservation scientist to champion intact nature in protected areas in recent years, using the Serengeti as his foremost example. Born in Zambia (then still a British colony under the name of Northern Rhodesia) in 1944, Sinclair has conducted long-term ecological research in the Serengeti since the middle of the 1960s, focussing especially on the ecologies of buffalo and wildebeest. Summing up his lifework as a conservation biologist in a series of publications and media productions since 2012<sup>13</sup>, Sinclair promotes the Serengeti as the quintessential embodiment of the conservation value of national parks<sup>14</sup>. Decades of ecological monitoring of the area have proven that protection and wildebeest migration were inextricably linked. Only the clearly demarcated borders of a park uninhabited by humans could guarantee the integrity of the migration plus provide a habitat for those top carnivores, mega herbivores, and other endemic species that would be unable to survive in human-inhabited, multiple-use landscapes. Apart from assembling ecological arguments that park boundaries are indeed capable of preserving what makes

11 Jacinta NZIOKA, Managing the Migration – Maasai Mara National Reserve and Serengeti World Heritage Site connectivity, in: Dodé HOUEHOUNHA / Edmond MOUKALA (eds.), *Managing Transnational UNESCO World Heritage Sites in Africa*, Paris / Cham 2023, pp. 1–8.

12 See e. g., CARO et al., *Conservation in the Anthropocene*.

13 See e. g., Anthony R. E. SINCLAIR, *The Serengeti Story. Life and Science in the World's Greatest Wildlife Region*, Oxford 2012.

14 Id., *Protected Areas are Necessary for Conservation*, in: George Wuerthner et al. (eds.), *Protecting the Wild: Parks and Wilderness*, the Foundation for Conservation, Washington D. C. 2015, pp. 72–79.

the Serengeti unique and outstanding – its biodiversity, the great migrations, and its abundance of iconic African megafauna –, Sinclair also argues for the necessity of preserving the Serengeti »as the most important natural ecosystem in the world«, indispensable in its value as a »baseline [...] against which we can monitor the tempo of human ecosystems to judge their stability and persistence«<sup>15</sup>. In 2021, Sinclair published another booklength study in which he draws out eight regulative principles that govern the functioning of the Serengeti ecosystem and make it »a place like no other«. A few years earlier in 2016, Sinclair, together with biologist Sean B. Carroll and other ecologists, had already conveyed these principles to the audiences and readership of a documentary film and popular science book. Both were aptly entitled »The Serengeti Rules«<sup>16</sup>.

Sinclair's presentation of the Serengeti as an intact ecosystem and a benchmark for understanding the rules of nature elsewhere is as much a vindication of the traditional protected area approach and a contribution to the Anthropocene conservation debate as it is a defence of understanding the Serengeti landscape first and foremost as Nature. In many respects, »ecosystem integrity« or »largely intact ecosystems«<sup>17</sup> are just the technical terms employed by conservation biologists to refer to areas that feature as wilderness in the popular discourse of conservation and wildlife tourism. These terms sound like science, yet still convey the connotation of pristine and portray human interference as dangerous unless it is done by conservation experts. Indeed, throughout his publications, Sinclair has been at pains to avoid the W-word, probably because critical humanities and political ecology has debunked it as a myth and misreading of landscapes often thoroughly shaped by human action in the past<sup>18</sup>. Yet, he conveyed the same meaning by presenting the state of nature in the Serengeti in ecological terms as a »natural« development following »natural« rules, set in motion by the protection of the migration within the boundaries of protected areas. Despite continuous and significant intervention over decades, he portrays conservation biologists merely as observers rather than managers. Summing up, Sinclair's publications rep-

15 Anthony R. E. SINCLAIR / René BEYERS, *A Place like no other. Discovering the Secrets of the Serengeti*, Princeton / Oxford 2021, p. xii, p. 1.

16 Sean B. CARROLL, *The Serengeti Rules. The Quest to discover how life works and why it matters*, Princeton / Oxford 2016.

17 For a detailed critique of the rise of »ecosystem integrity« as a guiding principle of international environmental policies see Thomas KIRCHHOFF, »Ökosystemintegrität« – ein geeignetes umweltethisches Leitprinzip?, in: *Zeitschrift für Praktische Philosophie* 7/2 (2020), pp. 191–220.

18 See e. g., Jonathan S. ADAMS / Thomas O. McSHANE, *The Myth of Wild Africa. Conservation without Illusion*, Berkeley et al. 1992; Roderick P. NEUMANN, *Imposing Wilderness. Struggles over Livelihood and Nature Preservation in Africa*, Berkeley et al. 1998.

resent a sacralization of the Serengeti through science: Threatened by the discursive desecration of Nature in the Anthropocene, the Serengeti is set apart as a space like no other through the attribution of ultimate value for predominantly ecological reasons. Indeed, it is invoked as counter-evidence of a still intact natural order and features as an immanent manifestation of this transcendent natural order. Sacralizing the Serengeti through science involves a reading of its past predominantly as a natural history, stressing evolutionary continuities with a deep past rather than focussing on the historical contexts of more recent social and political histories of the landscape. And sacralizing the Serengeti through science also involves presenting as ecosystem what is in fact a new human ecological regime of conservation and tourism compatible with a global capitalist economy.

The Serengeti features as a special place in the Anthropocene conservation debate for it has acquired, over the course of the last century, the reputation of a quintessential wilderness and one of the ultimate sacred spaces of international conservation. This dominant and sacred status has a complex genealogy, going far beyond the mere discovery of alleged »Serengeti Rules«. Seen from the vantage point not of conservation biology but the environmental or conservation humanities, respectively political ecology, the elevated status of the Serengeti was neither a natural phenomenon nor perhaps even brought about primarily by ecological developments. While hundreds of thousands of animals had an important role to play in the creation of their sanctuary, the Serengeti has not become the world's most renowned National Park because most of its wildebeest graze on the Southeastern Plains in Tanzania between January and April and in the Kenyan Masai Mara in August and September. I will argue in this chapter that the outstanding status of the Serengeti has been a product of its sacralization, the repeated attribution of ultimate and orienting values, and an understanding of the landscape as a manifestation of higher, transcendent principles, and ideas. The Serengeti has been eternalized as a cradle of mankind, as the visual icon of evolution and the eternal circles of life, as a window through which human visitors can glimpse into a prehuman world, and scientists of wildlife had a key role to play in this. The making of the Serengeti as a sacred space of Nature developed in an interplay of conservation politics, wildlife tourism, changing valuations and ideas of its nature, and the creation of a superlative, yet virtual Serengeti in nature writing, photographs, film, and touristic commercialization. Why and how the Serengeti was sacralized evolved with changing paradigms of perception and experience as well as with the application and development of technologies that created new knowledge and new imaginaries.

So far, the environmental humanities scholarship on the politics of the Serengeti National Park has focussed mainly on the late 1950s and early 1960s as the period of transition from colonial to postcolonial governance of the

park<sup>19</sup>. Researchers have elaborated on the changing coloniality of park governance by focussing, on the one hand, on the human rights conflicts arising from the resettlement of the pastoralist Maasai and other resident communities from the park. After almost a decade of controversies over the future boundaries of the park and the rights of human settlement and utilization within a National Park the late British colonial administration decided that National Park status was principally incompatible with human rights and settlement. From 1959 onwards, the Serengeti National Park was rendered »pure« Nature without permanent human residents apart from park administration and wildlife scientists – nothing less than a revolution in the human ecology of the park given its deep history of dynamic coexistence between humans and wildlife. On the other hand, scholars have identified Frankfurt Zoo Director Bernhard Grzimek as a key figure and alleged »honest broker« in the contested politics of the park<sup>20</sup>. With a view to sacralizations, his book *Serengeti shall not die* of 1959 and the accompanying award-winning documentary film of the same title are of particular interest. The film is not only credited with focussing international awareness on the park and its wildlife migration. Its title also established the ultimate rallying cry in defence of the park, which has been modified in countless variations in conservation conflicts around the world. Moreover, the film popularized key visual tropes that supported the status of the savanna as a heritage of mankind<sup>21</sup>.

In what follows, I would like to situate the 1959 conservation revolution and the role of Grzimek's films and books in a longer history of changing valuations and emerging sacralizations of the Serengeti. Having identified the »intact ecosystem« as a form of ecological sacralization and continuation of the wilderness theme in the introduction, I will now focus on the making of two other powerful, sacralizing narratives of the Serengeti that shape its global public image and temporalize the landscape in specific ways. One is the »Great Migration«, the other the Serengeti as a landscape of deep time and hominin / human evolution. The first sacralizes the Serengeti as eternal circle

19 Jan Bender SHETLER, *Imagining Serengeti. A History of Landscape Memory in Tanzania from Earliest Times to the Present*, Athens 2007, ch. 6; Roderick P. NEUMANN, *Ways of Seeing Africa: Colonial Recasting of African Society and Landscape in Serengeti National Park*, in: *Ecumene* 2/2 (1995), pp. 150–169; id., *Imposing Wilderness*; Thomas M. LEKAN, *Our Gigantic Zoo. A German Quest to save the Serengeti*, Oxford 2020.

20 For a comprehensive analysis of the role of Grzimek's film and person see LEKAN, *Our Gigantic Zoo*.

21 See *ibid.*, ch. 4; id., *Serengeti shall not die*. Bernhard Grzimek, *Wildlife Film, and the Making of a Tourist Landscape in East Africa*, in: *German History* 29/2 (2011), pp. 224–264; Tobias BOES, *Political Animals*. Bernhard Grzimek, *Wildlife Film, and the Making of a Tourist Landscape in East Africa*, in: *German Studies Review* 36/1 (2013), pp. 41–59; Bernhard GISSIBL/Johannes PAULMANN, »Serengeti darf nicht sterben«, in: Jürgen ZIMMERER (ed.), *Kein Platz an der Sonne – Erinnerungsorte der deutschen Kolonialgeschichte*, Frankfurt a. M. 2013, pp. 96–108.



of life following the sacred rhythms of nature, while the latter enshrines it as a showcase of humanity's evolutionary past. I trace how these narratives originated in changing European colonial perceptions of the Serengeti and how scientists were involved in their making. In a concluding section, I summarize my findings to discuss why any renewed scholarly attention to nature spiritualities and strong, cultural values in conservation must take into account the political ecology of these worldviews.

## 2. Serengeti made us human? The sacralized nature of hominization

The Serengeti-Mara landscape is ancient, owing its existence to the volcanic activity along the great East African rift<sup>22</sup>. Forming part of East Africa's high interior plateau and situated at an altitude between 1,600 and 1,800 metres above sea level, its prevalent and defining type of biome are semi-arid savannas, varying from the forested woodlands in the northern part along the Mara River that straddles the border between Kenya and Tanzania to the famous open, short-grass plains covering the south-eastern third of Serengeti National Park in Tanzania. Since the late 1950s, the Serengeti is understood in predominantly scientific terms as an ecosystem dominated by the annual migrations of wildebeest and other ungulates<sup>23</sup>. Given its deep geological origins and the prevalent type of savanna landscape with its animating wildlife, it is tempting to anchor the Serengeti's special character in specific natural features. Indeed, disciplines beyond the humanities, like palaeoanthropology and environmental psychology, have long wondered if there is something about savannas that appeals to humans on deep, evolutionary grounds. The so-called »Savanna Hypothesis«, forwarded, amongst others, by evolutionary biologist Gordon H. Orians and architectural theorist Roger S. Ulrich some four decades ago<sup>24</sup>, has many facets, including, amongst others the psychological claim that thanks to millions of years of hominization in the savannas of East Africa, humans have

22 Kristine L. METZGER et al., Scales of Change in the Greater Serengeti Ecosystem, in: Anthony R. E. SINCLAIR et al. (eds.), *Serengeti IV. Sustaining Biodiversity in a Coupled Human-Natural System*, Chicago 2015, pp. 33–72.

23 The plural here is deliberate, for there exists also a smaller and more regional migration of wildebeest within the Kenyan part of the ecosystem known as »Loita Migration«, see Robin S. REID, *Savannas of our Birth. People, Wildlife, and Change in East Africa*, Berkeley et al. 2012, p. 168.

24 See e.g., Gordon H. ORIAN, Habitat selection: General theory and applications to human behaviour, in: J. S. LOCKARD (ed.), *The Evolution of Human Social Behaviour*, New York 1980, pp. 49–66; Roger S. ULRICH, Aesthetic and Affective Response to Natural Environment, in: Irwin ALTMAN / Joachim F. WOHLWILL (eds.), *Behavior and the Natural Environment. Human Behavior and Environment*, vol. 6, Boston, MA 1983, pp. 85–125, URL: <[https://doi.org/10.1007/978-1-4613-3539-9\\_4](https://doi.org/10.1007/978-1-4613-3539-9_4)> (06-01-2023).

developed an innate preference toward this natural setting. Savannas provided food, water, shelter, and the conditions for survival. Since these landscape features provided advantages for survival throughout millennia of hominin and human evolution, modern humans are assumed to »retain a partly genetic predisposition to like or visually prefer natural settings having savanna-like or parklike properties such as spatial openness, scattered trees [...] and relatively uniform grassy ground surfaces«<sup>25</sup>. In other words, according to this reasoning the savanna has been the »selective ›environment‹ that has shaped humans during the course of their evolution«<sup>26</sup>: Because »we« are from the savanna, »we« feel home when encountering it.

The Serengeti has played such a prominent role as a model in this quest for the environment of hominin / human evolutionary adaptation that anthropologist Martha Tappen preferred to call it the »Serengeti Hypothesis« since so many scholars would treat it »as if it were the sacred spot where we evolved«<sup>27</sup>. A major reason for the model character of the Serengeti was the fact that Olduvai Gorge, a ravine that became famous as one of the foremost sites of paleo-anthropological and -zoological excavations since the early 20th century, was situated in the Eastern Serengeti Plain. Between the 1910s and 1930s, first and foremost German scientists mined the Gorge for fossilized remnants of ancient non-human life forms; then English-born anthropologist Mary Leakey and her husband Louis elevated Olduvai to international fame, particularly with the excavation of a spectacular series of hominin fossils since the late 1950s. Although Olduvai was understood as a part of the Serengeti relevant also for the animal migrations<sup>28</sup>, it came to be situated outside the Eastern border of the National Park when its borders were redrawn in 1959. This meant that scientific responsibilities were spatially divided ever since: Olduvai became the focus of paleoanthropological research, while the demarcated space of the National Park developed into the realm of ecology and animal-related sciences: Ethologists and wildlife biologists with funds from various universities and research institutions in Europe and North America flocked to the Serengeti to put park management on an empirically satisfactory scientific basis. This division notwithstanding, Olduvai continued to shape perceptions of the Serengeti: The one provided the hominin fossils,

25 Roger S. ULRICH, Biophilia, biophobia, and natural landscapes, in: Stephen R. KELLERT / Edward O. WILSON (eds.), *The Biophilia Hypothesis*, Washington D. C. 1993, pp. 73–137, at p. 89.

26 For a survey, see Robert FOLEY, *The Adaptive Legacy of Human Evolution: A Search for the Environment of Evolutionary Adaptedness*, in: *Evolutionary Anthropology* 4/6 (1995), pp. 194–203, at p. 194.

27 Martha TAPPEN, *Deconstructing the Serengeti*, in: Craig B. STANFORD / Henry T. BUNN (eds.), *Meat-Eating and Human Evolution*, Oxford 2001, pp. 13–32, at p. 16.

28 W. H. PEARSALL, *Report on an Ecological Survey of the Serengeti National Park Tanganyika*, in: *Oryx* 4 (1958), pp. 71–136.

the other the imagined environment in which these hominins had evolved. Indeed, the wildlife migrations as they came to develop under the conditions of the National Park became the benchmark for palaeobiological inference. For example, in a short piece co-written with Mary Leakey in 1986, the above-mentioned Anthony R.E. Sinclair took the annual migrations in the Serengeti as inspiration to suggest that hominin bipedalism »developed for long distance migration to scavenge from migrating ungulate populations«<sup>29</sup>. Similarly, the Serengeti hypothesis loomed large in UNESCO's justification of the Serengeti as a World Heritage site. Its outstanding universal value derived not only from »the largest remaining unaltered animal migration« but it was equally stressed that the Serengeti was »an outstanding example of a Pleistocene large mammal ecosystem where mankind developed as a hunter«<sup>30</sup>.

For the argument here, it is not so much relevant if the psychological version of the Savanna hypothesis is adequate and if affective responses to the Serengeti landscape and its wildlife have an evolutionary grounding or not<sup>31</sup>. Written testimonies throughout the decades show that emotional experiences were expressed in terms that are fully compatible with the savanna hypothesis. Such »positive« responses to the Serengeti rank from a simple »great!« on Tripadvisor to articulate philosophical reflections in letters, diaries, or other publications. A German colonial official traversing the Serengeti from East to West in April 1907, likened the plains to a »sea of grass, grass, grass and grass« and relished in the joy derived from its »almost unbounded vastness. One feels free with the gaze far and wide, as opposed to bush country, where a lack of oversight causes a feeling of constraint«<sup>32</sup>. Some 20 years later in 1925 Swiss psychologist Carl Georg Jung visited the Athi Plains south of Nairobi. A likely candidate to be drawn to archetypical landscapes thanks to his academic background, Jung described his encounter with the plains game as the archetypical situation of becoming-human and transforming »Nature« into »World«:

To the very brink of the horizon we saw gigantic herds of animals: gazelle, antelope, gnu, zebra, warthog, and so on. Grazing, heads nodding, the herds moved forward like slow rivers. There was scarcely any sound save the melancholy cry of a bird of prey. This

29 Anthony R.E. SINCLAIR et al., Migration and hominin bipedalism, in: *Nature* 324 (1986), pp. 307f., at p. 307, URL: <<https://doi.org/10.1038/324307c0>> (06-01-2023).

30 Advisory Body Evaluation (IUCN), World Heritage Nomination. IUCN Technical Review, 156 Serengeti National Park (July 1981), URL: <<https://whc.unesco.org/en/list/156/documents/>> (06-06-2023).

31 For a critical reading, see TAPPEN, Deconstructing the Serengeti.

32 Fritz JAEGER, *Das Hochland der Riesenkrater und die umliegenden Hochländer Deutsch-Ostafrikas. Ergebnisse einer amtlichen Forschungsreise ins abflusslose Gebiet des nördlichen Deutsch-Ostafrika 1906/07, Part 2: Länderkundliche Beschreibung*, Berlin 1913, p. 99.

was the stillness of the eternal beginning, the world as it had always been, in the state of non-being; for until then no one had been present to know that it was this world. I walked away from my companions until I had put them out of sight, and savored the feeling of being entirely alone. There I was now, the first human being to recognize that this was the world, but who did not know that in this moment he had first really created it. There the cosmic meaning of consciousness became overwhelmingly clear to me<sup>33</sup>.

It was irrelevant for the insight Jung wanted to convey if the encounter with an unconscious, timeless and eternal savanna animated by wildlife actually happened in the Serengeti or a like area in Eastern Africa. Jung provided the kind of anthropological or philosophical reflection that educated and sensitive visitors continued to reciprocate ever since, at times directly drawing upon his psychological musings. In 2011, US-American wildlife photographer Boyd Norton, for example, quoted Jung in the title of a voluminous and lavishly illustrated coffee table book entitled *Serengeti – The Eternal Beginning*, impressing upon his readers that this, indeed, was

country of the mind. [...] I sit alone atop one of the granite outcroppings out among the Gol Kopjes, watching the stillness of the grasslands below. [...] Sitting here, without the metal armor of a vehicle to protect me, I feel very vulnerable. And totally at the mercy of the elements. It forces you to become more attuned to the environment, knowing that you are not in complete mastery of your surroundings. Every rustle in the bushes cause a quickening of the pulse. [...] At such times, sitting in the great loneliness, I have realized that my own survival skills have long been diluted in the vast gene pool of my more modern and civilized ancestors. Could I survive out here? Not likely<sup>34</sup>.

In different ways, the sources presented here testify to a heightened awareness and increased sensitivities about what it means to be human, including the potential of becoming prey<sup>35</sup>. The encounter with the savanna and its wildlife triggered evolutionary and anthropological reflections, on the archetypical, world-making encounter between humans and wildlife, in the case of Jung, or Norton's musings on the vulnerability felt by modern humans when exposed to the environment in which their forebears had had to survive. The list of such reflections could easily be extended<sup>36</sup>, for example by US-American

33 Meredith SABINI (ed.), *The Earth has a Soul: C. G. Jung on Nature, Technology & Modern Life*, Berkeley 2002, p. 48.

34 Boyd NORTON, *Serengeti. The Eternal Beginning*, Golden, CO 2011, pp. 11f.

35 On the sacred dimensions of this theme, see Bron TAYLOR, *Dark Green Religion. Nature Spirituality and Planetary Future*, Berkeley et al. 2010, pp. 127–131; Val PLUMWOOD, *Human vulnerability and the experience of being prey*, in: *Quadrant* 39/3 (1995), pp. 29–34.

36 See e. g., J. Donald HUGHES, *The Serengeti: Reflections on Human Membership in the Community of Life*, in: *Capitalism, Nature, Socialism* 10/3 (1999), pp. 161–168.

wildlife biologist George Schaller, who spent several years at the Serengeti Research Institute during the 1960s to study the ecology and behaviour of lions. In a short piece entitled »Memories of Eden«, Schaller mused later that

at least once in a lifetime every person should make a pilgrimage into the wilderness to dwell on its wonders and discover the idyll of a past now largely gone. If I had to select just one such spot on Earth, it would be the Serengeti. There dwell the fierce ghosts of our human past; there animals seek their destiny, living monuments to a time when we were still wanderers on a prehistoric Earth. To witness that calm rhythm of life revives our worn souls and recaptures a feeling of belonging to the natural world. No one can return from the Serengeti unchanged, for tawny lions will forever prowl our memory and great herds throng our imagination<sup>37</sup>.

Schaller's eulogy is remarkable not only for its poetic quality, charged religious terminology and the transcendent values ascribed to the Serengeti as a site to reconnect to humanity's deep past. Indeed, his work was directly informed by the Savanna hypothesis, and his perception of the Serengeti was shaped through his belief in the landscape's deep hominin past. In a similar passage in an earlier work in which Schaller popularized his research, he confessed that

I was more aware of a sense of time in the Serengeti than in any other area in which I have been. Walking across the plains I would find obsidian flakes in wind-eroded depressions, carried there from far hills by some early hunter in search of prey. As I looked across the undulating grasslands with their endless herds, I felt a unity with it all, a unity so intense that memories of the past seemed to pervade the air. The wildebeest and zebra were ghosts trekking through the millennia and the volcanoes of the Crater Highlands still stood there, as they have done since the dawn of man<sup>38</sup>.

Schaller's idea of unity, respectively kinship mediated through the Serengeti has developed in the context of a three-years study of the ecology and behavior of lions between 1966 and 1969. Impressed both by the savanna hypothesis and the contemporary anthropological debate over the hunting origins of man<sup>39</sup>, Schaller believed that »in the open woodlands and plains, areas rich in wildlife, [...] man the hunter evolved«<sup>40</sup>. Besides his ethological fieldwork, he would, »when walking across the plains the past so palpably around me, [...] try to view my surroundings as one of these near-men might have

37 George B. SCHALLER, *Memories of Eden: Serengeti* [1989], in: Id., *A Naturalist and other Beasts. Tales from a Life in the Field*, San Francisco 2007, pp. 97–104, at p. 104.

38 Id., *Golden Shadows, Flying Hooves*, New York 1973, p. 254.

39 For background see Erika Lorraine MILAM, *Creatures of Cain. The Hunt for Human Nature in Cold War America*, Princeton / Oxford 2019.

40 Ibid., p. 260.

done«<sup>41</sup>. This included serious attempts to live like a hominin and try scavenging food, as he perceived the collective ways of hunting espoused by lions and other social carnivores as the best model for hominin and early human social organization<sup>42</sup>. Schaller's Serengeti was, thus, not only temporalized as a Pleistocene landscape or even older. He himself contrasted his work with the primatological studies of Jane Goodall. A comparison of his approach with Goodall's feminist primatology reveals the gendered nature of Schaller's imaginings of the past Serengeti. While Goodall celebrated communion and fostered a female »spiritual-ecological connection«<sup>43</sup> with humans' hominid next-of-kin, Schaller engaged in interspecies empathy with lions to learn about hominin collective hunting and celebrated the masculine spirituality of the hunt as a social carnivore.

European observers, under colonial rule and after, have always been prone to read any African landscape animated by larger numbers of wildlife as »pristine« or primeval wilderness, as nature not yet subdued by man. The excavation of hominin and paleozoological fossils in the Serengeti area added a further layer of meaning. Those who knew about these findings started to interpret the Serengeti as an evolutionary landscape, the kind of nature that enabled »us« to become human. Schaller's example exposes the evolutionary narrative of the Serengeti as both gendered and universalist. Its hominin and »human« subjects of evolution drew upon the masculinity of the man the hunter-debates of the late 1960s and 1970s. At the same time, the »human« subject of the evolutionary narrative was conceptualized as unmarked and universalist, which made it possible that all the male white scientists quoted above, could place themselves in their fantasies as the direct inheritors of universal evolutionary manhood.

The Serengeti Hypothesis had its heyday between the late 1960s and 1980s and has received some serious criticism since. Feminist science studies exposed its evolutionist gender bias, while anthropologists criticized the Serengeti's alleged model status<sup>44</sup>. Anthropologist Martha Tappen, for instance, drew attention to the variations of modern savannas as well as climatic fluctuations in the past to dispute the epistemic status of the Serengeti as the »quintessential savanna«. Exactly because it is a place like no other, it is, therefore, not representative for »the« savanna<sup>45</sup>. Still Olduvai is too close not to affect the

41 SCHALLER, *Golden Shadows*, p. 259.

42 See e.g., id. / Gordon LOWTHER, *The Relevance of Carnivore Behavior to the Study of Early Hominids*, in: *Southwestern Journal of Anthropology* 25/4 (1969), pp. 307–341.

43 See Erika Lorraine MILAM, *Secular Grace in the Age of Environmentalism*, in: Myrna Perez SHELDON et al. (eds.), *Critical Approaches to Science and Religion*, New York 2023, pp. 207–228, at p. 207.

44 Philip HOWELL, *Hunting and animal-human history*, in: Id. / Hilda KEAN (eds.), *The Routledge Companion to Animal-Human History*, London 2018, pp. 446–473.

45 TAPPEN, *Deconstructing the Serengeti*.

Serengeti and the understanding and marketing of the National Park. Located outside the park, but inside the Serengeti ecosystem, Olduvai transforms the concrete landscape between Ngorongoro and Ikoma into a showcase of evolution, one of the sacred spaces to go to grasp a sense of deep evolution and planetary belonging. Both the Planet and Evolution are transcendent entities and processes, too big and abstract to feel or encompass beyond select localizations. Such sacralization adds powerful cultural value to a natural site, as exemplified not only by the World Heritage label but also in the day-to-day business of the safari industry. Several tour operators advertise packages including Olduvai and Serengeti as once-in-a-lifetime experiences under the label of, for example, »The Cradle of Humanity Safari«<sup>46</sup>, and professional Content Marketing Managers use evolutionary sacralization to sell Serengeti safaris as encounter of a universal human with a universal landscape:

Our origins are found in Tanzania's gorges and valleys, the unearthed fossilized bones of our ancestors dating back millions of years. Spanning as long as human existence, we have lived side by side with the other creatures of this planet. It is human nature to want to know where we came from, to seek out the mysteries of our past. We have always sought out a sense of belonging, and perhaps part what we are searching for is here, in a landscape that can never truly belong to anyone, but nevertheless leaves us linked, imprinting on our soul<sup>47</sup>.

### 3. Making the Migration Great (Again?)

In her criticism of the Serengeti Hypothesis, Martha Tappen also cautioned against an ahistorical understanding of large-scale wildlife migrations as the defining feature of any savanna: »In the Serengeti«, she argued, »the spectacular migration of one and a half million wildebeest is a recent phenomenon«<sup>48</sup>. Along a similar vein, environmental scientist Robin S. Reid disputed the existence of the »great« migration between the 1890s and 1960s, for *Rinderpest* imported through Italian cattle in the late 1880s exerted repeated checks on cattle and wildebeest numbers in the Serengeti unless vaccination campaigns in the early 1960s eradicated the disease<sup>49</sup>. The Serengeti migration as only a recent creation may sound counterintuitive to anyone who has assumed it to represent a continual natural heritage of deep time – »the largest remaining

46 See e.g., Thirdhome Adventures (ed.), The cradle of humanity safari, URL: <<https://adventures.thirdhome.com/tours/the-cradle-of-humanity-safari/>> (06-01-2023).

47 Emily GOODHEART, Serengeti Calling (6 November 2019), published by Natural Habits Adventure, URL: <<https://www.nathab.com/blog/serengeti-calling/>> (05-26-2023).

48 TAPPEN, Deconstructing the Serengeti, p. 16.

49 REID, Savannas of our Birth, p. 177.

unaltered animal migration«, as UNESCO had it back in 1981. In several respects, it is not. This »Great Migration« is often superficially described as the »natural«, superlative state of affairs in the Serengeti since time immemorial. But the migration has only become »Great« with a capital G since the late 1970s, and the landscape has not been understood in the primarily scientific terms of an ecosystem before the late 1950s. While locals always had an intimate and differentiated knowledge of place and wildlife behaviour, the Germans, British, and North-Americans who came as explorers, colonizers, and big game hunters since the late 19th century did not. They referred to the area as part of »Maasailand«, conceived of it, at least initially, as a dreaded waterless wilderness almost impossible to traverse in dry periods, and they picked up a misunderstood version of the term for endless plain – *siringet* – from the local Maa language to turn it into the future denomination of the area. Had colonial interlocutors met members of local Natta communities first, we might perhaps refer to the Ghumari ecosystem instead<sup>50</sup>.

Tracing the site/sight-sacralization of the Serengeti as the home of the »Great Migration« shows how the Serengeti evolved from the dreaded waterless wilderness of the decades of colonial conquest via the disputed ecological units of the 1950s into an ecosystem governed by wildlife migrations as perceived since the 1960s. Over the course of a century, not only the perception of the area and its wildlife changed but also the area and its human and non-human inhabitants, as well as the means and media through which the Serengeti was experienced. Recurring checks on ungulate populations by *Rinderpest* notwithstanding, the main term in which European visitors conceived of the Serengeti for the first half of the 20th century was abundance. Years before the US-American big game hunter Stewart Edward White popularized the Serengeti to the English-speaking world as »the very last virgin game field«<sup>51</sup>, German colonial officials and hunters were lost for words to capture the experience of close-up encounters with »thousands and thousands« of wildebeest, zebras, and various kinds of antelopes. As abundant as the game on the plains were rhetorical tropes of abundance, and that such primeval plentifulness must be seen to be believed<sup>52</sup>. These scientific and military expeditions were completely dependent on the navigation skills of

50 Fredrick E. CHIWANGA / Nickson P. MKIRAMWENI, Ethno-ornithology and onomastics in the Natta community, Serengeti district, Tanzania, in: *Heliyon* 5/10 (2019), e02525, URL: <<https://doi.org/10.1016/j.heliyon.2019.e02525>> (06-01-2023).

51 Stewart Edward WHITE, *The Rediscovered Country*, Garden City/New York 1915, p. 4.

52 See e.g., Bericht des Hauptmanns Freiherrn v. Schleinitz über seine Reise durch das Massagebiet von Ikoma bis zum ostafrikanischen Graben im März 1904, in: *Deutsches Kolonialblatt* 1904, pp. 527–533; *Das Massagebiet, eine Wildkammer in Deutsch-Ostafrika*, in: *Wild und Hund* 10 (1904), pp. 668f.; Karl MUELLER, *Jagdtage in der Serengeti*, in: *Wild und Hund* 21 (1915), pp. 6–9.



local guides and trackers, whom they usually identified as »Dorobbo« hunt-ergatherers and whose landscape memory they described in both admiring and racist terms. The movement – »wanderings« – of the plains game was noticed, but only in terms of their rainfall-dependent seasonal presence or absence in certain known areas.

The abundance of wildlife may have been awe-inspiring but in the hunt-ing-minded imperial worldview of the early 20th century, wildebeest and zebras hardly counted as charismatic. What made the Serengeti spectacular for Euro-American big game hunters during the first half of the 20th century were the lions that preyed on the plains game. Indeed, the Serengeti acquired international fame as »Lion Country«: In the 1920s, Nairobi's notorious and decadent settler elite not only provided international newspapers with closeup photographs from the Serengeti Lions taken from motor cars but took the wan-ton massacred of lions from cars and airplanes to such excesses that it stirred an imperial controversy over wildlife ethics, amongst others in *The Times*. In the usual racist combination of imperial self-civilization achieved at the exclusion of local hunting, parts of the Serengeti were declared a closed game reserve in 1929 and elevated to National Park status in 1940, respectively 1951. It was in the context of this Lion Craze that the movements of the Serengeti herds were, to my knowledge, first referred to as »great migration«. Looking for photogenic motives other than lions, US-American wildlife photographers Osa and Martin Johnson stumbled upon the herds in movement in the East-ern Serengeti in 1928:

So dumbfounded were both of us at what we saw that for minutes we could not say a word. We weren't even certain that we could believe our eyes. We just sat there tongue-tied for at least five minutes. [...] *At least ten million head of zebra and wildebeest covered the veldt for miles in front of us!* [...] Never before in our life had we seen such a spectacle; never did we expect to see such a sight again<sup>53</sup>.

The Johnsons turned some of their enthusiasm into photographs taken in the constant fear of triggering a stampede – probably the beginning of the long visual history of the Serengeti migration and an attempt to visualize not a species or individual specimen but an ecological process.

53 Martin JOHNSON, *Lion. African Adventures with the King of Beasts*, New York 1929, pp. 256, 259.



THE GREAT MIGRATION.

After the zebra had pushed on in migration came the wildebeeste, millions of them. They took all the grass and water as they went. We saw scores of dead young animals that had been trampled to death.

Figure 1: »The Great Migration«; Source: Martin JOHNSON, *Lion. African Adventures with the King of Beasts*, New York 1929, opposite p. 229

Apart from providing first pictures of the migration, they also raised questions that have continued to puzzle researchers ever since: What actually conditioned this mass movement, especially as there were no identifiable leaders, and why »did this huge mass of game deliberately turn out of its way in order to avoid a beautiful section of the plain ten miles in diameter, where the grass was luxuriant and where there was water?«<sup>54</sup> Conversations with European settlers and local hunters did not yield the desired answers. Nonetheless, the Johnsons perceived »the migration« as a single and annual phenomenon, consisting of wildebeest and zebra moving in and out of Tanganyikan territory into Southern Kenya. They framed it as an aweinspiring spectacle characterized by all the tragedies of human migrations. Its witnessing made the Serengeti an outstanding emotional experience:

Many sights that we have seen in Africa still impress us as being unique; but for drama, for power, for sustained excitement, no other experience that we have ever had approached those hectic days that we spent on the fringes and in the heart of ten million zebras and wildebeeste that made up the great migration of 1928<sup>55</sup>.

<sup>54</sup> Ibid., p. 264.

<sup>55</sup> Ibid., pp. 270f.

However, it was not until the controversies over the prevalence of human or animal rights during the 1950s that the wildlife migration became the Serengeti's main defining feature. An internal memorandum on the attractions of the Serengeti National Park compiled in the early 1950s still listed the »vast herds of animals« alongside the »world famous« lions and the »famous Masai« who »graze their large herds of cattle near the wildebeest and zebra«<sup>56</sup>. The principle acknowledged by both international conservationists and the Tanganyikan colonial administration to set a precedent and deny any human rights in the territory of a National Park led to a settlement of the conflict by spatial segregation of land uses. This required a drawing of the boundaries to make the park, as much as possible, a viable ecological unit. Since the early 1950s, scientists sponsored by British and American conservation societies undertook several wildlife estimates and counts on the ground and from airplanes, of which the first aerial census of the entire Serengeti-Mara Region in 1961 confirmed a »significant irregular interchange of zebras and wildebeests« between Tanganyika and Kenya and established the numbers of the two key migratory species at around 240,000 (wildebeest) and 172,000 (zebras)<sup>57</sup>.

It was in this context that Frankfurt Zoo Director Bernhard Grzimek and his son Michael popularized their own 1958 aerial count of the Serengeti wildlife in their bestselling book and documentary film *Serengeti shall not die*. The film continued the mediatization of the migrations, framed them as the remnant of an abundant wildlife once characteristic for all African plains and globalized the conservationist perception of the Serengeti as the last place on earth where nature's eternal laws reigned supreme. In their studies of Grzimek's films and books, historians Franziska Torma and Thomas Lekan have drawn attention to the »quasireligious terms«<sup>58</sup> in which Grzimek framed his campaigns to save Africa's wildlife. Indeed, Grzimek is a good example how conservationists from a Christian cultural background, for all their »secular« scientific thinking, resorted to the terms, tropes and narrative patterns of Christianity to express ultimate values<sup>59</sup>. In his books and films, Grzimek combined a naturalist critique of Christian humanism with an evolutionist nature piety that ascribed ultimate value to »Nature« and »Life«. Grzimek implicitly portrayed

56 Tanzania National Archives, Tanganyika Territory Files 24979, »The Serengeti National Park«, undated manuscript [ca. 1951].

57 Lee M. TALBOT / D. R. M. STEWART, First Wildlife Census of the Entire Serengeti-Mara Region, East Africa, in: *The Journal of Wildlife Management* 28/4 (1964), pp. 815–827.

58 Thomas LEKAN, A Natural History of Modernity. Bernhard Grzimek and the Globalization of Environmental *Kulturkritik*, in: *New German Critique* 128 (2016), pp. 55–82, at p. 75; Franziska TORMA, Eine Naturschutzkampagne der Ära Adenauer. Bernhard Grzimeks Afrikafilme in den Medien der 50er Jahre, München 2004.

59 On Grzimek's religiosity see Ulrich LINSE, Bernhard Grzimek, in: Barbara STAMBOLIS (ed.), *Jugendbewegt geprägt. Essays zu autobiographischen Texten von Werner Heisenberg, Robert Jungk und vielen anderen*, Göttingen 2013, pp. 305–324.

himself as a modern-day Noah following a calling to once more save Creation<sup>60</sup>, and the fact that towards the end of their aerial count, Grzimek's son Michael lost his life in a plane crash near Ngorongoro helped underwrite the gravity of his mission. Here was a father who had lost his dearest, and a son who had sacrificed his life for the noble cause, leaving the film as his legacy. Grzimek did not fail to exploit this tragical emplotment in the last chapter of the book, which culminates, after reflections over generations, human ideals and nature's eternity, in the message of Michael's death. His son's martyrdom for wildlife provides the basis for the apotheosis of the eternity of Life on Earth, as symbolized in the Serengeti's migration.

Grzimek conceived of Africa's wildlife as a natural heritage of equal importance as cultural heritage sites like Athens' Acropolis or Rome's Cathedral of St. Peter, which provoked problems with conservative West German film censorship, who regarded this parallelisation, by then an already well-rehearsed trope in conservationist discourse, as an improper valuation and an insult of occidental cultural achievements. While the nakedness in the film was no problem as long as it could be understood as an ethnographic gaze upon the »native« body, the equation of natural and cultural heritage of mankind caused a temporary scandal that only added to the film's popularity<sup>61</sup>. Interestingly, much of the strong religious terminology Grzimek employed in the German original was lost in translation. In a key phrase of the book, for example, Grzimek presents the Serengeti as a pilgrimage site with the appeal to bridge colonial divisions of humanity:

Wenigstens an einem kleinen Fleck soll die Welt so herrlich bleiben, wie sie erschaffen ist, damit schwarze und weiße Menschen nach uns hier andächtig werden und beten können. Wenigstens die Serengeti darf nicht sterben<sup>62</sup>.

This powerful invocation of piety and prayer in the face of Creation is tuned down in translation towards the relatively weak claim that »One small part of the continent at least should retain its original splendour so that the black and white men who follow us will be able to see it in its awe-filled past glory«<sup>63</sup>. The sacred space of Creation is tuned down to a mere window into the past

60 The reading of Grzimek as Noah is taken up, amongst others, by Harold T.P. HAYES, *The Last Place on Earth*, New York 1977.

61 For a detailed analysis of these controversies, see TORMA, *Naturschutzkampagne*, pp. 165–189.

62 Bernhard GRZIMEK/Michael GRZIMEK, *Serengeti darf nicht sterben*. 367 000 Tiere suchen einen Staat, Berlin 1959, p. 220.

63 Bernhard GRZIMEK/Michael GRZIMEK, *Serengeti shall not die*, translated by E.L. and D. REWALD, London 1960, p. 225.

in the English translation. Grzimek, however, presented so many variations of this trope that the spiritual urgency of his claim was not entirely lost on his English-speaking readership:

Much earlier still Europe presented a similar picture. That was life on earth before man was fruitful and multiplied and »subjugated nature«. In the years to come you will have to fly to the Serengeti if you want to see the splendour that was nature, before God gave it to man to keep and cherish. That will be the only place to watch big herds on the move<sup>64</sup>.

It must be emphasized that Grzimek's attribution of ultimate value to the Serengeti migration is not interpreted here as sacralization because it is expressed in a religious language. Rather, it is indicative of twentieth-century European and Western conservationism as a sciencebased and -driven ideal that the public expression of these ideals often resorted to the language, tropes, and rituals of established religions. The cultural grammar for expressing ultimate values was often a Christian one. However, for all the work Grzimek had done to establish the wildebeest migrations as the Serengeti's defining natural feature, at least two elements of its current sacralization were still missing in the late 1950s: It was neither Great nor yet cyclical. Grzimek used »circuit«<sup>65</sup> only once in his book to describe the general pattern of migration but put no further emphasis on it for knowledge was far too little to infer any generalizing pattern. As wildebeest ecologist Richard D. Estes stated in hindsight, »no one at the time understood much about the migration«<sup>66</sup>.

Indeed, it would take decades of research to grasp at least so much of its ecological complexities that Anthony R. E. Sinclair felt confident enough to establish his »Serengeti Rules«. By the middle of the 1970s, the migration was increasingly referred to as »cyclical«, while from the late 1980s onwards, it became more common to refer to the »Great Migration«. Both qualifiers speak to the intertwined nature of ecological processes and research-based management that have characterized the Serengeti ever since the 1959 Revolution, when, for the very first time in millennia of human / wildlife-co-evolution, the Serengeti was now defined as a »natural« space entirely devoid of humans, apart from its guardians, scientists and ephemeral visitors. The Maasai pastoralists and hundreds of thousands of cattle had to leave, so had other communities formerly residing within the park boundaries; in moved safari tourists and the wildlife scientists of the Serengeti Research Institute. The Serengeti became a non-human ecology monitored by scientists and managed

64 Ibid., p. 222.

65 Ibid.

66 Richard D. ESTES, *The Gnu's World. Serengeti Wildebeest Ecology and Life History*, Berkeley et al. 2014, p. 118.

according to scientific knowledge. This put the migrations henceforth on a different ecological basis. Wildebeest numbers exploded, thanks to the gradual eradication of *Rinderpest* among the herds, and to the removal of domestic cattle as competition for pasture and potential host of diseases: by 1971, they had reached almost 700,000, another six years later 1,4 million to level off slightly afterwards<sup>67</sup>. This enormous increase not only impacted upon the Serengeti's species composition, resulting, for example, in a tripling of lions and an increase of hyenas to the disadvantage of wild dogs who disappeared from the park by the early 1990s<sup>68</sup>. The skyrocketing wildlife numbers also meant that the migration became both cyclical and great with a capital G. More animals meant more animals on the move in search of food, including ungulates beyond wildebeest and zebra, like Thomson's gazelles. In 1995, Anthony R. E. Sinclair stated that the »annual cycle of movements by wildebeest, zebra, Thomson's gazelle, and eland is known as ›the migration«<sup>69</sup>. Writers and photographers aiming for audiences beyond a scientific readership were less reluctant in their choice of words and marketed their lavishly illustrated publications as visualizing the »Great Migration«<sup>70</sup>. After the turn of the millennium »The Great Migration« was taken up broadly as destination branding, finding its way into travel guides and advertising, and onto the official website of the National Park. Apart from touristic distinction, this could also be interpreted as a flagging out of »the original« in response to a surging interest in animal migrations worldwide, resulting from the increased visibility of the phenomenon through radio-tracking and other remote sensing technologies<sup>71</sup>.

Indeed, it was also the application of technological innovation – improved aerial photography, radio-collaring and, most recently, remote sensing – that

67 Anthony R. E. SINCLAIR, Population Increases of Buffalo and Wildebeest in the Serengeti, in: *East African Wildlife Journal* 11 (1973), pp. 93–107, at p. 104; id., Place like no other, p. 42.

68 Craig R. JACKSON et al., No evidence of handling-induced mortality in Serengeti's African wild dog population, in: *Ecology and Evolution* 9/3 (2019), pp. 1110–1118; Alexandra SWANSON et al., Cheetahs and wild dogs show contrasting patterns of suppression by lions, in: *Journal of Animal Ecology* 83/6 (2014), pp. 1418–1427.

69 Anthony R. E. SINCLAIR, Serengeti Past and Present, in: Id./Peter Arcese (eds.), *Serengeti II. Dynamics, Management, and Conservation of an Ecosystem*, Chicago/London 1995, pp. 3–30, at p. 15.

70 See e.g., Jonathan SCOTT, *The Great Migration*, London 1988; Carlo MARI/Harvey CROZE, *The Serengeti's Great Migration*, New York et al. 2000.

71 Simone SCHLEPER, Airplanes, cameras, computers, wildebeests: The technological mediation of spaces for humans and wildlife in the Serengeti since 1950, in: *Environment and Planning E: Nature and Space* 5/2 (2022), pp. 740–761, URL: <<https://doi.org/10.1177/25148486211005659>> (06-01-2023); Adam M. FUDICKAR et al., Animal Migration: An Overview of one of Nature's Great Spectacles, in: *Annual Review of Ecology, Evolution, and Systematics* 52 (2021), pp. 479–497; E. J. MILNER-GULLAND et al. (eds.), *Animal Migration. A Synthesis*, Oxford 2011.

»long-term change in the pattern of migration«<sup>72</sup> could be monitored<sup>73</sup>. While earlier research had described seasonal movements mainly in linear terms of back and forth, the continuous and repeated monitoring of ungulate numbers and movements allowed to identify various wildebeest populations. Some of them performed only more localized seasonal movements, while others trekked long distances. By 1973 enough data had been collected to ascribe annual differences in migration patterns to variations in rainfall and allow Linda Pennycuick to identify the basic pattern of the Serengeti's migratory wildebeest population. Spending the wet season on the Serengeti plains, they move west into the so-called corridor towards Lake Victoria with the beginning of the dry period, and onto the Northern part of the park and across the Mara River into Kenya. With the beginning of the rains, they return to the Serengeti plains again<sup>74</sup>. Greater numbers afforded more migration and more space to feed, which necessitated the regular utilization of the Kenyan Mara, including the crossing of the Mara River. In other words, this crossing, a favourite among tourists and an iconic feature of any wildlife film about the migration, has only become a regular seasonal event in the wake of the »Park Revolution«.

Inspired by this research, British wildlife filmmaker Alan Root followed the herds for two years to document their trek in the 1974 film *The Year of the Wildebeest*. Root framed the trek as a »life-cycle story«, from the outset pitting human time against the cyclical time that mattered for the wildebeest: »In the calendar by which man measures his year, it is May. For the wildebeest, it will soon be time for the great trek to begin«. The film opens by synthesizing the movements of hundreds of thousands of wildebeest into one continuous circle. Then Root presents the »story of a journey that has taken place for thousands of years«, a spectacular drama of recursive life and death and one of nature's great mysteries:

Do they move because the available water on the plains has become too saline? Are they heading towards the smell of rain, or the lightning they see at night? We still do not know and I prefer it that way. I find it deeply satisfying that we do not understand why over a million animals suddenly move hundreds of miles – there are things in nature that are best left a mystery<sup>75</sup>.

72 Linda MADDOCK, The »Migration« and Grazing Succession, in: Anthony R.E. SINCLAIR/Mike NORTON-GRIFFITHS (eds.), *Serengeti. Dynamics of an Ecosystem*, Chicago 1979, pp. 104–129, at pp. 107f.

73 SCHLEPER, *Airplanes*.

74 Linda PENNYCUICK, Movements of the migratory wildebeest population in the Serengeti area between 1960 and 1973, in: *East African Wildlife Journal* 13 (1975), pp. 65–87.

75 Alan ROOT, *Ivory, Apes and Peacocks. Animals, adventure and discovery in the wild places of Africa*, London 2012, p. 195.

Safari operators, films, books, and articles in popular travel or science magazines like *Merian* or *National Geographic* have readily taken up and perpetuated the metaphor of a complex »circle of life«<sup>76</sup>, with the wildebeest as its driver and the mysteries surrounding its causes and functioning. In terms of the Serengeti's sacralization, the cyclical nature of the migration added yet another, mythical dimension to its value. The migration and its circumstances provide plenty of identification, drama, compassion, pity, and admiration for the wildebeest and their collective will to persevere. It is less about a single charismatic species than about a natural process functioning independent of humans. By conceiving of the migration as a fragile yet stable, closed and ultimately harmonious cycle, nature is rendered a functioning whole in which humans are predominantly perceived as disturbance. The cycle is an ancient symbol of wholeness and perfection at the same time as it renders the migration a process, dynamic, closed, and autonomous. Once scientists have established its existence and described its functioning, it becomes a natural order that can be charged with moral values or serve for contemplation on its fullness as well as on the remaining mysteries. Most significant are the temporalities inherent in understanding the migration as a cycle. Remember the double temporal shift in Root's *Year of the Wildebeest*, from the human calendar to the rhythms of nature on the one hand, and from the annual cycle of the migration to its eternal character on the other. Because the wildebeest make a cyclical return to the short-grass plains of the Serengeti, to give birth to tens of thousands of offspring and then start the cycle all over again, this performance is read to be the same since thousands of years. In the eyes of many conservationists and conservation scientists, by the 1970s, the Serengeti migration has been restored to its former full and greatness again: »The wildebeest multiplied and started to remember their original routes of migration«<sup>77</sup>. This is how Markus Borner, long-time representative of the Frankfurt Zoological Society in the Serengeti, put it two decades ago and it is a fascinating assessment. It implies that the cyclical state of the migration – itself an abstraction and dependent on very special conditions of rainfall, population size, etc. – equals its »natural« or »original« state, and that there is such a state at all. Such a claim, however, cannot be substantiated for it refers to a historical

76 See e.g., Wild Safari Guide (ed.), Great Migration, URL: <<https://wildsafariuide.com/experiences/natural-phenomena/great-migration/>> (06-01-2023); Brian JACKMAN, Animal Magic, in: *The Sunday Times*, 25 May 2007; Kalle HARBERG, Die Rastlosen (2016), in: *Zeit Online*, 03.11.2017, URL: <[https://www.zeit.de/entdecken/reisen/merian/serengeti-gnus-tierwanderungen-safari?utm\\_referrer=https%3A%2F%2Fwww.ecosia.org%2F](https://www.zeit.de/entdecken/reisen/merian/serengeti-gnus-tierwanderungen-safari?utm_referrer=https%3A%2F%2Fwww.ecosia.org%2F)> (06-01-2023); Peter GWIN, Der heimliche König, in: *National Geographic* (Dec 2021), pp. 56–67.

77 Markus BORNER, Koblode, Überlebenskünstler und Wandergesellen: die Serengeti-Gnus, in: *Habari. Zeitung der Freunde der Serengeti Schweiz* 15/2 (2000), pp. 3–7, at p. 4.



baseline that cannot be known, and it infers from a moment produced by decades of anti-human ecology to a time when migratory species co-existed with humans, early humans or met conditions that had been different from today. Interpreting the current state as expression of an original ideal is reminiscent of what scholar of religion Mircea Eliade has described as an archaic ontology, characterized by the »conscious repetition of given paradigmatic gestures«: »The crude product[s] of nature« acquire »their reality, their identity, only to the extent of their participation in a transcendent reality. The gesture acquires meaning, reality, solely to the extent to which it repeats a primordial act«<sup>78</sup>. In how far this is true for the wildebeest, we do not know, but the conservationist is quite obviously inferring from reproduction to archetype, from historical moment to transcendent principle. This is the power and the problem of sacralizing the migration as a circle of life: As in *The Year of the Wildebeest*, it seduces to understand a moment in history, produced by conservation politics, as an eternal spectacle, perhaps even a hierophany, of »Nature« or »Life«. The sacralized time of Nature eclipses historical time and its complicated politics, and at times it is consciously invoked by believers to do so.

#### 4. A political ecology of the Nature Sacred

It is standard knowledge in critical conservation studies that the current global conservation regime is predicated upon a dichotomous Western worldview that separates humans from nature. For decades, its foremost practice has been »fortress conservation«, the enclosure for protection of a piece of wild, aesthetically pleasing or biodiverse land ideally pristine and uninhabited by humans. Human habitation, hunting, resource use, etc. became illegal and subject to high fines; in many cases such National Parks and related protected areas were created by the large-scale resettlement of human inhabitants. There have always been alternatives to this kind of »fences-and-fines«-approach and the fortress conservation became subject to fundamental critique since the 1970s, amongst others by affected indigenous people. Still, the Serengeti continues to be governed according to the fortress model and receives support in this from a »new back-to-the-barriers«-movement in the Anthropocene conservation debate. However, it is a fortress of sorts, with walls of selective permeability. Since the Serengeti-Mara ecosystem is defined by the routes and extent of the migration, animals routinely trespass the boundaries of the National Park. This led to several extensions of the borders since the 1960s and the creation of adjacent Game Reserves and Wildlife Management Areas to grant further protection to migrating animals also outside the park. It speaks for the

78 Mircea ELIADE, *Cosmos and History. The Myth of Eternal Return*, New York 1959, p. 5.

inviolable status of the migration that human-wildlife conflicts at the border are usually framed as problems of human population growth and land use pressure on the park's borders. Hardly ever are they framed as problems emanating from wildlife overpopulation in the park.

This chapter has proposed to analyse the attribution of ultimate, partially transcendent values and strong emotional attachments to the Serengeti as a form of sacralization. This is not to say that sacralization, as a social and cultural phenomenon, always consists first and foremost of discursive attributions – it also pertains to political acts like boundary-drawing, ritualized behaviour like tourism, and experiences framed in a sacralizing terminology. However, these forms of social action derive much of their meaning and urgency from norm-setting narratives and orienting ideals as have just been presented. Two sacralizing narratives in particular helped create and maintain the Serengeti's status as a virtually inviolable sacred natural space for decades into the present: the narrative of the Serengeti as a site of hominin evolution, and the narrative of the Serengeti as the Home of the »Great Migration«. Both narratives have deep roots in the European »discovery« and perception of the region and both set the Serengeti apart in temporal terms – as a Pleistocene or even older landscape at the beginning of a linear timeline on the one hand, and as a site of cyclical time of Nature on the other. Both narratives, in their specific ways, eclipse the human factor in the making of the Serengeti landscape: in the evolutionary narrative, the universal conception of the »human« involved eclipsed the question of the Serengeti as a functioning human ecology also in historical time, whereas the »Great Migration« interprets the cyclical nature of the migration achieved in the 1970s as the restoration of its original, natural state, consequently conceiving of human interference merely as disturbance of a natural cycle. Both narratives essentially do frame-work, they name, frame and elevate their object, as conceived of by anthropologist Dean MacCannell in his theory of sight sacralization<sup>79</sup>. They provide frames of perception for phenomena not immediately visible in the landscape – no individual observer can see evolution or the migration cycle in the landscape. These frames must be adopted through mediatized discourses of conservation and tourism. Once applied, the Serengeti becomes a site of immanent transcendence of the larger principles of »evolution« or »nature«, to be admired and contemplated full of awe. Both narratives were, thus, fully compatible with embodied, yet largely visual tourist consumption and capitalist commodification. For the latter, sight sacralizations of scientific origin were invaluable assets for destination branding. Finally, both narratives were fabricated first and foremost through white male observers, with scientists playing a particularly important role in

79 See Dean MACCANNELL, *The Tourist. A new theory of the leisure class*, Berkeley, Los Angeles 2013 (first published in 1976), pp. 43–48.

their making. Either their scientific methodology required pristine and purified nature for study; or their findings themselves had sacralizing implications, or they adopted a sacralizing language and terminology, or they themselves derived moral imperatives from their scientific findings. Knowledge secured with scientific methods and through the application of latest technological achievements, thus, spawned new sacralizations of nature.

Anthropologist Jan Bender Shetler has qualified such narratives as part of the »global conservationist view« that has been cast upon the Serengeti by Euro-American outsiders who came first as colonizers and hunters, later also as scientists and tourists. In her history of the landscape memories of Western Serengeti peoples, she gives voice to the perceptions of the Serengeti landscape by the Ikoma, Nata, Ikizu, Ishenyi, and Ngoreme people, several of whom had to leave their original homesteads as they came to be situated within the park borders in 1959 or later. Their landscape memories include stories of so-called *emisambwa*, often sites where ancestors were buried who are regarded as powerful spirits in the mediation between the respective community and the land<sup>80</sup>. Although some of these sites have been inaccessible for decades since they came to lie behind the park borders, Shetler's interlocutors in the late 1990s were well aware of their existence and whereabouts. In conservationist discourse, these people usually feature as »poachers« and threat to the wildlife, not as actors with their own histories of dispossession through conservation, their own ontologies with wildlife, and their own sacralized perceptions of the Serengeti. The abandoned *emisambwa* show that the hegemonic sacralization of the »Great Migration« was a contest over competing sacralities, however among parties with very unequal access historically to sources of power, capital, and platforms of articulation.

The fact that there was such a contest nonetheless, however invisible for Western audiences, should caution against an altogether too benign view of the current conjunctures of the nature sacred in academic and social discourse. This is one of the important lessons to learn from the genealogy of the Serengeti as a sacred space. Understanding conservation and protected areas as forms of nature sacralization ties in with the recent rediscovery of »values« in the broader conservationist discourse. Partially in opposition to the »nature turn« in economics and finance<sup>81</sup>, at least some practitioners of conservation acknowledge that support for their measures cannot be based solely on the

80 SHETLER, *Imagining Serengeti*, ch. 3.

81 See, as a recent key document, the 610-pages review by Cambridge economist Partha Dasgupta for the British Government: Partha DASGUPTA, *The Economics of Biodiversity. The Dasgupta Review*, London 2021. Dasgupta discusses sacredness as one of six possible sources that imbue ecosystems with value and recommends it, amongst others, as a language more amenable to the public than the »hard-nosed cost-benefit analysis« of nature's economic value.

capitalist potential of »nature-based« solutions or the communication of the latest scientific findings about the »conservation value« of a certain area or ecosystem<sup>82</sup>. Instead, conservation should be anchored in broader regimes of social and cultural meaning beyond the »Western scientific model«, which include ethics, aesthetics, religion, and other faith-based valuations of the natural environment. Indeed, there has been a growing acknowledgment over the last decade within key institutions of international conservation governance like IUCN that mainstream conservationist discourse has long neglected and overlooked the ecological relevance and spiritual importance of »sacred natural sites« and species. While this literature has significantly increased the visibility and valuation of indigenous worldviews and faith-based environmental attitudes within global conservationist discourse, it has often taken the sacred as given rather than a cultural construct. Also, proponents of sacred natural sites have perhaps cultivated an overly benign view of the compatibility, if not convergence of protected areas and »traditional« concepts of sacred nature<sup>83</sup>. However, the logic of the nature sacred still dominant in Western science – setting nature apart – has often been in conflict with ethics of kinship, dwelling and becoming within an animated world that characterize many indigenous and rural worldviews in the Global South.

Therefore, any hopeful embrace of the current conjunctures of the nature sacred need to be confronted with the sensitivities for justice and power relations characteristic of political ecology. To a degree, the two problems just identified within the new discourse on values in conservation – an ontological and at times essentialist understanding of the nature sacred as well as a benign perspective on its potential in times of multiple environmental crises – are shared by current academic projects that try to make sense of the undeniable growth and recent conjunctures of the nature sacred, particularly across so-called Western societies. Religious studies scholar Bron Taylor, for example, has assembled compelling evidence for the transatlantic, and since the 1960s increasingly global spread of attitudes that regard nature as »sacred, imbued with intrinsic value, and worthy of reverent care«<sup>84</sup>. Taylor subsumes these

82 See e.g., Virginia CAPMOURTERES/Madhur ANAND, »Conservation Value«: A Review of the concept and its quantification, in: *Ecosphere* 7/10 (2016), e01476, URL: <<https://doi.org/10.1002/ecs2.1476>> (06-01-2023); Mark INFIELD et al., Reflections on cultural values approaches: Lessons from 20 years of implementation, in: *Oryx* 52/2 (2017), pp. 220–230; Guillaume LATOMBE et al., What is valued in conservation? A framework to compare ethical perspectives, in: *NeoBiota* 72 (2022), pp. 45–80.

83 See e.g., Gloria PUNGETTI et al. (eds.), *Sacred Species and Sites. Advances in biocultural Conservation*, Cambridge 2012; Bas VERSCHUUREN et al. (eds.), *Sacred Natural Sites. Conserving Nature and Culture*, London/Washington D.C. 2010; id./Steve BROWN (eds.), *Cultural and Spiritual Significance of Nature in Protected Areas. Governance, Management and Policy*, Abingdon/New York 2019.

84 TAYLOR, *Dark Green Religion*, p. ix.

attitudes – espoused by groups as diverse as philosophers and poets, scientists and spiritual seekers, radical environmentalists, activists, lovers of wildlife, or surfers – under the label of »dark green religion«. Although the dark is supposed to express both intensity as well as the ambivalence and potential harm of sacred convictions, the overall understanding of the phenomenon is benign and hopeful: »dark green religion« and its various sacralizations of nature are expected to encourage pro-environmental behaviour and to constitute a civic movement powerful enough to create »environmentally sustainable and socially just lifeways«<sup>85</sup>. Few there are who would not like to share this spirit of hopefulness. And yet, nature spiritualities do not automatically breed multispecies conviviality. The social heterogeneity of »dark green religion« as a global movement-in-the-making, its contradictory understandings of what is sacred in nature (some of which stress connectedness whereas others seek to set »nature« apart) as well as the cultural logics of the sacred have led to conflicts in the past, and there is no reason to believe that they will not do so in the future. The sacred has been a source of power, it has been enmeshed in asymmetrical structures of political power, and it has intersected with other exclusive categories such as race, class, gender, and knowledge. Again, the Serengeti provides a case in point: Its hegemonial sacralization as wilderness originated under colonial rule, its key ritual of the safari is of equal colonial origin, its racialist asymmetries only superficially reformatted by a primarily capitalist logic in the postcolony<sup>86</sup>. The Serengeti has been a site of conflicting sacralities, attributed to the place by social groups with highly asymmetrical power, visibility, and capacities to participate in the governance of the sacralized site. As a consequence, the sacralities attributed to the Serengeti by its human residents before their eviction for conservation in the 1950s have long been eclipsed by the dominant scientific, cultural, and economic values attributed to the Serengeti by powerful outsiders. No analysis of the nature sacred is complete without attention to its political ecology.

Finally, also the transdisciplinary field of sacralization studies (if it actually exists) can benefit from historical analyses of the nature sacred. It is a truism often stated that natural features and phenomena count among the most ancient sites of the sacred in human history – almost no contribution to the recent debate about sacred natural sites can do without reference to this deep history, thereby portraying their particular claims to sacred natures in the present as an expression of the »natural« and original way humans organized

85 Ibid., p. 218.

86 See the works of Cassie M. HAYS, *A Sociology of Safari. Techné and Travel in Tanzania*, PhD Dissertation Yale University 2009; ead., *The »Park« as Racial Practice: Constructing Whiteness on Safari in Tanzania*, in: *Environmental Values* 28 (2019), pp. 141–170; Benjamin GARDNER, *Selling the Serengeti. The Cultural Politics of Safari Tourism*, Athens/London 2016.

their relationships to their natural environment. Scholars have made sense of the nature sacred in evolutionary histories and typologies<sup>87</sup>, and in many respects the historical conjunctures of the nature sacred run counter to alleged long-term processes of secularization and disenchantment, respectively criss-cross the spheres of the religious and the secular. Also, the study of nature in its various sacralizations allows to probe the validity of different conceptualizations of the sacred, such as the discursive and performative attribution of sacrality on the one hand, and the role of experience on the other. Particularly the latter, experiences with wildlife and the non-human communicated in a sacralizing language, provide a fertile ground for new materialist and post-humanist approaches. However, as this chapter has shown, the challenge in the Serengeti is not so much to do epistemic justice or draw attention to the multiplicity of species beyond the human. Rather, a posthumanist approach to conservation in the Serengeti must come to terms with the antihumanist colonial legacies and politics that have enabled multispecies flourishing so far, however at the cost of the Serengeti's original human inhabitants.

87 See e.g., Roy A. RAPPAPORT, *The Sacred in Human Evolution*, in: *Annual Review of Ecology and Systematics* 2 (1971), pp. 23–44; Bronislaw SZERSZYNSKI, *Nature, Technology and the Sacred*, Malden, Oxford 2005.

Simone Horstmann

## Why the Golden Calf not Only had to be Destroyed, but *Eaten*

On the Intricate Monotheistic Relation of Sanctity  
and Edibility in Antiquity and the Anthropocene

### 1. Introduction

Perhaps the most striking objects of religious (de-)sacralization processes were and are – admittedly in highly different phenomenal manifestations – non-human animals. In order to evaluate today's discussions about a resacralization of animals and nature in general, which is often understood as a theological panacea against a profaned and thus thoroughly devalued natural environment, it therefore seems necessary not only to recall this deep and intricate relation between animals and processes of (de-)sacralization but also to begin with two hermeneutical remarks.

(1.) Today, it is only possible to speak appropriately about non-human animals in a way that recognizes the subjectivity of these animals and thus fulfils fundamental *normative* conditions. Today's theologies<sup>1</sup>, however, still find this recognition extremely difficult: not least because the recognition of other animals forces theologies to no longer normalize forms of religious violence against animals and to critically address their own traditions as violent. I will therefore deal very critically with the frequently presupposed assumption that the monopoly on interpretation and evaluation of ascriptions of sanctity lies with the theologies. This attribution already seems highly problematic since the theologies have a massive history of guilt towards non-human animals and have proven themselves in large parts to be incapable or unwilling to come to terms with this guilt. From the point of view of strict animal ethics, there is much to suggest that the monotheistic religions in particular – albeit in very different forms – have not only a superficial but rather a very profound and structural affinity to violence against animals<sup>2</sup>.

1 Unless otherwise stated, the generic term »theologies« in this contribution refers to the theologies of the monotheistic religions.

2 Simone HORSTMANN (ed.), *Religiöse Gewalt an Tieren. Interdisziplinäre Diagnosen zum Verhältnis von Religion, Speziesismus und Gewalt*, Bielefeld 2021.

(2.) In addition to this normative prerequisite, it is equally important to take a closer look at the *historical* roots of this religiously contoured question. Such a perspective provides historical depth to the tensions between theologies and the normative presupposition mentioned above: A modern view of animal ethics that takes the intrinsic value of animals seriously is alien to almost all traditional strands of the monotheistic religions that at best meet standards from Animal Welfarism. From these intellectual roots, it should ultimately be possible to analyze more clearly the typicality of theological models that revolve around the triad of sacredness, profanity, and animality. Of course, this can only be addressed selectively at this point. Therefore, this contribution will focus on a paradigmatic and exemplary topos, namely on the biblical figure of the Golden Calf: a biblical narrative that traces a process of animal sacralization and counteracts it posthaste<sup>3</sup>. The narrative of the Golden Calf thus exemplifies how animals in the context of monotheistic religions historically but also systematically became (involuntary) actors of (de-)sacralization processes and in which way these developments proceeded to the disadvantage of the animals themselves and therefore are to be evaluated today rather as part of the problem than as part of the solution. In particular, I am interested in the question of what role the *consumption* of animals plays in the attributions of sacredness or profanity/paganism: Why, then, was it so important in the biblical narrative not simply to destroy the Golden Calf but to literally infuse its matter dissolved in water into the apostate people?

## 2. The Golden Calf: (De-)Sacralized Animals

The story of the Golden Calf<sup>4</sup> can be found – along with the Pentateuch parallel in Deuteronomy 9–10 – in the biblical book of Exodus (Exodus 32): During Moses' absence on Mount Sinai, his brother Aaron remains alone in the desert with the people of the Israelites who have fled from Egypt. Impatience arises because of Moses' long absence – and the Israelites ask Aaron to create a cult image for them («Come, make us Gods to go before us» – Exodus 32:1).

3 In the biblical story of the Golden Calf »nature becomes the ultimate good« – a monotheistic impossibility to be revised. John BERKMAN, Must We Love Non-Human Animals? A Post-Laudato Si Thomistic Perspective, in: *New Blackfriars* 102 (2022), pp. 322–338, at p. 328.

4 For a comprehensive overview of various biblical and extra-biblical strands of tradition concerning the figure of the Golden Calf, see Eric F. MASON/Edmondo F. LUPIERI (eds.), *Golden Calf Traditions in Early Judaism, Christianity, and Islam*, Leiden et al. 2018.



Aaron then creates a golden bull calf from the Israelites' gold jewelry. After other animals were offered to him as burnt offerings, the people finally gather in front of the Golden Calf for a communal meal, which – if one follows the usual exegetical interpretations – quickly turns into excess. On his return, Moses is horrified by the sight. Before he orders the brutal slaying of thousands of the Israelites guilty of worshipping the cult image, he himself smashes the Decalogue tablets brought down from Mount Sinai in rage and finally also grabs the Golden Calf, »burning it in the fire and trampling it to dust. The dust he sprinkled in water and gave it to the Israelites to drink« (Exodus 32:20).

Based on this short paraphrase, the relationships that an animal-centered perspective on religious (de-)sacralization processes entails can be traced. First of all, there is the simple observation that almost all relevant semantizations – probably due to the strong motifs of religious sacrifice and substitution<sup>5</sup> – occur in a strangely duplicated form in the text<sup>6</sup>: The two tablets of the Decalogue are replaced a short time later by two identical copies; the animals also occur twice – as real, killed sacrificial animals as well as in form of the golden cult image. Likewise, the function of eating and drinking is doubly coded by the dissolving of the Golden Calf in water on the one hand and by the previous common meal on the other. Moses and Aaron, as a pair of siblings and central leaders, also form an important double structure; this also applies to God himself, since he first appears to Moses on the mountain, and at the same time the people of the Israelites believe they see him in the cult image – almost everything in the short narrative, up to the last sentence of the narrative (»The LORD struck the people for making the calf that Aaron had made« – Exodus 32:35) seems to be doubled, mirrored in a counterpart.

- 5 Jonathan Klawans, for example, assumes that sacrificial thinking in ancient Israel is related to a constitutive analogy: »There is an analogy at the heart of sacrifice«. Jonathan Klawans, *Sacrifice in Ancient Israel. Pure Bodies, Domesticated Animals, and the Divine Shepherd*, in: Paul Waldau/Kimberley Patton (eds.), *A Communion of Subjects. Animal in Religion, Science, and Ethics*, New York 2006, pp. 65–80, at p. 73.
- 6 Similarly, Dmitri Slivniak, *The Golden Calf Story. Constructively and Deconstructively*, in: *Journal of the Study of the Old Testament* 33/1 (2008), pp. 19–38, points to the »central opposition of normative cult to deviant cult« (ibid., p. 21) as a hierarchically structured core relation in the biblical narrative: »The opposition of the normative cult to the deviant one, although not philosophical, is clearly a hierarchy: the normative cult is evidently better. The opposition is also violent in the most literal sense of the word: it is enough to mention that around 3000 golden calf worshippers were killed by the levites« (ibid.).

Figuration 1	(De)sacralization processes	Violence	Figuration 2	Theological discursivities
Two original Decalogue tablets	Divine Scripture <-> Human but inspired writing	Material destruction	Second pair of tablets written down by Moses (Exodus 34)	Scriptural Hermeneutics/ Revelation Theology
Killed sacrificial animals (burnt offerings)	Symbol. Consumption of the sacrificial animal by God <-> Consumption of the dissolved golden calf	Consumption	Golden Calf	?
Moses	Direct relationship with God <-> or indirect relationship with God (priesthood)	Personal degradation	Aaron	Office structure/ theol. legitimation of power
YHWH at Sinai	Worship of the cult image <-> desecration of the cult image	Killing of 3,000 Israelites (and further punishment from God Exodus 32:35)	YHWH (supposedly) in the cult image	Image of God and inner-biblical criticism of religion

Table 1: Overview of (de)sacralization processes in the context of the biblical narrative of the Golden Calf; Source: Simone Horstmann

Between the respective poles of these more than conspicuous dual structures, constant attributions of (non-)legitimacy and especially (non-)sacrality take place, which are also associated with specific forms of religiously connoted violence. One of these processes in particular will now be discussed: How is it to be understood that perhaps the most obvious semanticization of the (de-)sacralization of the cult image is so clearly associated with the *eating of* animals, with a downright devouring, digesting violence? While the (symbolic and / or factual) consumption of the sacrificial animals within the biblical narrative initially consolidates the sacredness of the cult image, the subsequent dissolution in water and the consumption of the Golden Calf profanes and desacralizes the cult image in a way that seems highly interesting for the analysis of (de-)sacralization processes. Yet, it usually remains strangely uninterpreted. In contrast to the other processes of (de-)sacralization, one will finally have to conclude here that the consumption of animals in the biblical narrative seems to take on *both a* sacralizing and desacralizing function. This – possibly constitutive – ambivalence will be examined more closely in the following

chapters in order to first clarify the correlation between sacredness, profanity, and edibility and then to illuminate in more detail how this relationship is reflected in modern discourses that negotiate structurally analogous questions around re- / de-sacralizations of animals in particular. In this sense, I would like to show how historical discursivities around the understanding of animality and edibility also shape today's debates in the context of the Anthropocene, without the significance of the relationship between sacredness and (animal) edibility already having been sufficiently clearly elaborated in academic discussions. For while it can be said of all the other (de-)sacralization processes mentioned above that they were implemented in the relevant theological structures (e. g., on the topics of theology of revelation, critique of religion, question of religious ministries), there are hardly any established ways of processing the relationship of animal edibility and holiness discourses within Christian theology so far.

### 3. Profaned Animals

Before the relation between animal edibility and discourses of sacredness can be examined in more detail, I would first like to link the ancient biblical narrative and modern questions and problems and thereby sharpen our view of the context and the communicative pressure, under which the question of a possible resacralization or at least a de-profanaion of animals (and often also of nature in general) is negotiated *today*.

The assumed connection between the modern animal industry on the one hand and the ancient biblical episode on the other may seem counterintuitive at first glance. After all, today we usually assume that the biblical cult image of the Golden Calf has little to do with the living animals that constitute the »material« for today's slaughter industry. However, this very focus on the dimension of liveliness potentially obscures what should actually matter. Analytically interesting is the process and structure that is actualized in both contexts and which, in my opinion, can therefore be studied in a structurally analogous way. In both cases, it is about a form of killing or, more precisely, about the banishment and commodification of something to which the respective cultural contexts fundamentally ascribe a certain value, even if not an absolute one. How and why this process is tied to the religious process of profanation in both cases will be explained here<sup>7</sup>.

7 Apart from this structural approach, a genealogical dimension could also be identified in this constellation, which can only be hinted at here. Under this methodological premise, it would have to be discussed to what extent today's predominantly industrial killing of animals, precisely in its completely secular self-understanding, still constitutes an expression of secularized religious content. Such a reading could be oriented

If we look from the biblical narrative of the Golden Calf to today's discourses, then both an overlap in content as well as structural differences clearly stand out. The most striking overlap might be the perception that animals are mostly considered profane: Given the distinction between sacredness and profanity, they are almost invariably assigned to the latter – just as the Golden Calf, as the symbol of apostasy par excellence<sup>8</sup>, was radically profaned by its dissolution in water. Seen in this light, in the biblical narrative and more closely in the figure of the Golden Calf, the trace of a development could be discerned that leads up to the mega-slaughterhouses of modernity: Here, as there, the respective animal is not only *not* encountered as a subject in its own right with inviolable – and in this respect also to be called sacred – protective rights but as a mere object whose comprehensive insignificance is practically produced and publicly demonstrated<sup>9</sup>. Indeed, nothing else should be certified by the classification as profane made from a decidedly religious angle: to segregate a part of life or of the living beings as killable, consequently as not

above all to Karl Löwith's thesis, according to which the project of modernity constituted a secularization (initiated in particular by Christianity itself) of religious and in particular of biblical ideas and promises – modern, secular consciousness would then be just as religious in its origin as it is completely areligious in its own self-understanding. Karl LÖWITH, *Meaning in History. The Theological Implications of the Philosophy of History*, Chicago 1949.

- 8 »The trend we are detecting is that transgression of any covenant with God becomes analogous or at least comparable to the making of the calf. [...] The precise legal function of the covenant-making ritual was to stipulate that whoever broke the pact would be broken into two, just like the sacrificial animals. Hebrew Jeremiah, then, refers to a sacrificed, covenant-making calf, not to the (golden) calf of Exodus. The calf is a sacrifice, not an idol to which sacrifices are offered«. Edmondo F. LUPIERI, *A Beast and a Woman in the Desert, or the Sin of Israel. A Typological Reflection*, in: Eric F. MASON/Edmondo F. LUPIERI (eds.), *Golden Calf Traditions in Early Judaism, Christianity, and Islam*, Leiden et al. 2018, pp. 157–175, at p. 159.
- 9 This also becomes clear in contrast to another religiously connoted form of killing animals, which is practiced above all in Judaism and Islam: Slaughter without anesthesia, which is correspondingly torturous for the animals, represents a different phenomenological facet of religious violence against animals insofar as it does not profane the animals at all – in Judaism, the animal to be killed must be »pure«, i. e., suitable for cult, in Islam it must be killed »halal«. Neither halal nor ritual purity are identical with sanctity (therefore the slaughtered animals are not considered holy). Their religious status is nevertheless strikingly different from the status of completely profaned animals and also from that of animals within secular slaughter industry. While the latter is designed in its processes and mechanisms to deprive the dying of animals of any meaning and to naturalize and technify the killing process as completely as possible, this does not apply to forms of ritual killing: the attributes »halal« or »pure« aim at the cultability, i. e., the intra-religious addressability of the animals. Therefore, they can certainly be understood as an attempt to ascribe a genuinely religious meaning to animals. The fact that the result for the animal individuals is at least as agonizing as in the industrial killing contexts must probably be emphasized nevertheless, because above all the ritual killing is often negotiated as a supposedly better alternative – also in contexts of Christian theologies.

grievable<sup>10</sup>. The burning and dissolution of the Golden Calf, and particularly its subsequent consumption, expressing the meaninglessness of the cult image within the biblical narrative, thus seems to evoke a structural, i. e., above all functional analogy to the completely normalized and mechanical killing of animals in the so-called animal industry in modernity. So, despite their *historical* distance, both practices share the *functional* commonality to identify animals as fundamentally consumable. They present the respective animals vice versa in such a way that their destruction and destructibility can be used as a legitimizing proof of the respective social or religious conviction<sup>11</sup>.

The message conveyed by the subsequent act of consuming the respective animal is one and the same in the case of the Golden Calf as in the case of all those nameless farm animals of today's societies: It constitutes and consolidates the conviction that non-human animals are completely destructible, downright annihilable<sup>12</sup>. It is surprising, but only at first glance, that the nihilistic moment of this consuming violence bears religious traits in both cases. In the case of the Golden Calf, these are also so clearly evident because the entire narrative context is religious in nature: the desacralization or profanation of the animal cult image through its subsequent consumption thus proves the nihilistic trait of this violence to be quite compatible with a religious self-conception since the consuming violence is functionalized precisely to legitimize the actual religious doctrine and, in this case, the legitimate actors and addressees of the sacred.

The destructive and consuming violence that takes place at the Golden Calf (and whose secularized resonance then leads to the animal industry of modernity) may also be so massive and drastic in its narrative form because the desacralization of the cult object thus carried out *coram publico* refers not only to its thereby established profanity, but rather (also) to its *pagan* roots: In this sense, a whole series of exegetical approaches emphasize that the Golden Calf symbolically refers above all to the animal cults of the foreign religions surrounding ancient Israel. Edmondo F. Lupieri, for example, emphasizes that the textual editors, by explicitly describing the cult object as a bull calf, were influenced by »the existing Hellenistic tradition of describing the god Apis

10 James STANESCU, *Species Trouble. Judith Butler, Mourning, and the Precarious Lives of Animals*, in: *Hypatia* 27/3 (2012), pp. 567–582.

11 Important here, for example, is the work of Youn Ho CHUNG, *The Sin of the Calf. The Rise of the Bible's Negative Attitude Toward the Golden Calf*, New York 2010, which traces not so much systematically as exegetically and, more closely, traditionally how the perception of the calf increasingly changes towards the negative within the biblical period of redaction and then finds its accumulation in Exodus 32.

12 Simone HORSTMANN, *Zwischen Ritualismus und Nihilismus. Dekonstruktionen religiöser Gewalt an Tieren*, in: Ead. (ed.), *Religiöse Gewalt an Tieren*, pp. 7–34; ead., *Die Abschaffung der Arten. Theologische Extinction Studies zwischen annihilatio mundi und décréation*, in: *Tierstudien* 20 (2021), pp. 79–88.

from Egyptian theriolatry as a *μύσχος*«<sup>13</sup>. One can therefore assume that the strong association of sanctity and animality, which can be found in the pagan religions is one of the reasons why the violence against the golden animal cult image is emphasized so much, as it demonstrates the importance of the First Commandment (i. e., the prohibition of foreign gods). Nevertheless, there are also traditions of interpretation that do not attribute the desacralization in Exodus 32 so much to the pagan origins of the Golden Calf but rather find in its destruction and consumption an expression of the fact that the text as a whole can be read as an urgent veto against any association not only of animalism and holiness but even more generally of materiality and holiness. Such interpretations usually start with the interpretatively challenging observation that Moses' anger is not initially directed at the Golden Calf but against the stone tablets of the Ten Commandments – the exegesis thus had to explain why Moses *first* smashes the tablets and is described by the text as being much angrier than when the Golden Calf is destroyed *afterwards*. This observation can only be understood when it is considered together with Moses' absence, which was mentioned earlier: Rabbi Meir Simkhah Hacoen of Dwinsk (1843–1926), for example, starts from the thesis that Moses' anger stemmed from the fact that the people identified the Torah with his physical presence: With his (temporary) absence, his teachings were also considered irrelevant by the Israelites – in addition to the construction of the Golden Calf, it was therefore already this prior identification of Torah and Moses' physical presence, with which the people violated one of the fundamental prohibitions of the Torah. For this reason, Moses therefore also had to smash the stone tablets in order to pre-empt a possible identification of the stone tablets with God in view of the cultic figure of the calf. All three possible or completed identifications were thus contradicted by Moses' actions – the aim of the text is thus to show that there is no sanctity in created objects, according to Rabbi Meir Simkhah<sup>14</sup>.

There seems to be much to suggest that the story of the Golden Calf brings together motifs of the desacralization of natural entities – be it animals, people or natural objects – and seeks to inculcate this desacralization as a necessity of biblical faith. It is precisely this tendency to desacralize the natural world that

13 LUPIERI, *Beast*, p. 161. Sabine OBERMAIER, Hedgehog Skin and Golden Calf. Animals as Symbols for Paganism in Medieval German Literature, in: Celia DEANE-DRUMMOND / David L. CLOUGH (eds.), *Animals as Religious Subjects. Transdisciplinary Perspectives*, London 2013, pp. 81–102; similarly argues Alexandra LIEVEN, *Stierkulte*, in: *Der neue Pauly. Enzyklopädie der Antike*, vol. 11, ed. by Hubert CANKIK / Helmuth SCHNEIDER, Stuttgart / Weimar 2001, pp. 992f.

14 Quoted from Nehama LEIBOWITZ, *Studies in Shemot (The Book of Exodus)*, vol. 2, transl. by Aryeh NEWMAN, Jerusalem 1976, pp. 613–615.

seems to be a theological problem for many today since a completely profaned nature appears to imply the legitimation for its comprehensive instrumentalization. In the article cited at the beginning of this contribution, John Berkman sums up very well the problem that emerges in the field of tension between sacredness, profanity and the role of non-human animals constituted therein:

In contrast to the exaltation of nature viewpoint, the instrumentalization viewpoint assumes that the world is a stage on which human beings are the only actors. Non-human animals (and the rest of creation) are at best the backdrop for a purely human drama. Charles Taylor has referred to this view as part of the disenchantment of the natural world in modernity. In a disenchanted world, other animals can be completely instrumentalized. Non-human animals are mere material to be used, which human beings can treat as any other commodity. They are to be bought and sold, bred or destroyed, and endlessly manipulated for any purpose or even for no worthwhile purpose. At its worst, no thought or concern for the well-being of individual animals or species is required<sup>15</sup>.

It is due to enquiries like these that today's debates often give rise to a resacralization or redivinisation of animals or the natural, also theologically. Still completely independent of the nevertheless important question of how such an undertaking could be achieved *performatively*, in the following section I would like to pursue the question of whether such a reorientation is actually advantageous for animals themselves.

#### 4. Resacralized Animals

Prima facie, the strategy of a resacralized nature seems logical and quite sympathetic: it seeks to underline the moral worthiness of protection of non-human living beings from a theological perspective by associating them with the sacred and thus by deprofanizing them. This assumption is linked to (at least) two major presuppositions, which will be discussed in this and in the following section. The first presupposition refers to the assumed *empirical* effectiveness of this strategy of a resacralization of nature in the broad sense and of animals in particular. Concerning this presupposition, I will present a skeptical approach. In the next and last section, the focus will then be on a subsequent consideration: What exactly are the *reasons* for the ineffectiveness of a strategy of resacralizing animals? With this emphasis, the second presupposition of the strategy of resacralized animals will be critically examined: Is it true that the theological articulation of the moral value of non-human life

15 BERKMAN, Must We Love Animals?, p. 329.

must necessarily proceed along the distinction between sacred and profane? Does the discussion about resacralized animals operate, in other words, in the right frame of mind?

To discuss the first assumption, let us return to the story of the Golden Calf. The duplicate structures within the biblical narrative, which were briefly mentioned at the beginning, mean that a more precise description of the problem must also be made with regard to the classification of animals: The last section has discussed the profanation of the calf, a central problem of animal ethics that still has a negative impact today. Now, the focus will be on the complementary structure: After all, not only the Golden Calf appears in the narrative as an explicit reference to animals but also the animals sacrificed to it.

Without being able to fully catch up with the highly complex discussions about the theological significance of the concept of sacrifice in general and the sacrifice of non-human animals in particular, I still would like to point out that the narrative itself shows with remarkable clarity that *neither* profaned *nor* cultic, i. e., sacred animals, are and were treated with particular esteem<sup>16</sup>, quite the opposite in fact: Even if there are still isolated apologetic voices that seek to prove the ritual killing and, more closely, the sacrifice of animals as »animal-friendly« or »gentle«, this thesis has probably been sufficiently empirically refuted<sup>17</sup>. While the sacrificability of animals is, at least in theological terms, conceivable as a consequence of their resacralization (which here denotes the religiously established cultic status), today it is more likely to be a different phenomenon that is associated with a resacralized, re-enchanted nature: Thus, above all, the »New Animism« linked to the work of David Abram, Tim Ingold, Eduardo Kohn, Eduardo Viveiros de Castro and Philippe Descola, among others, promises to offer an alternative to the

16 It is important to mention here that this assessment only applies to the monotheistic religions – on the significance of sacred cows in Hinduism, for example, see Kunalan MANOKARA et al., Mind your meat. Religious differences in the social perception of animals, in: *International Journal of Psychology* 56 (2021), pp. 466–477, who points out that animals associated with sacredness in Hinduism receive greater privileges through this social perception. A meta-study examining a similar question in the context of the Islamic faith concludes that religion is either neutral or detrimental to the perception of other animals: »Several studies show that more often than not, religion hinders the awareness off and efforts towards environmental sustainability, where it depresses concern about the environment. Others, however, have found that the belief in God or the identification with a particular religion is not associated with measures of environmental concern«. Dexon PASARIBU et al., Do religious belief influence concerns for animal welfare? The role of religious orientation and ethical ideologies in attitudes towards animal protection among Muslim teachers and school staff in East Java, Indonesia, in: *Plos One* 16/7 (2021), pp. 1–24, at p. 3.

17 An impressive description of the cruelty of animal sacrifice can be found, for example, in Simone PAGANINI, Massentierhaltung und Massentiertötung. Der Fall von Opfertieren am Jerusalemer Tempel in römischer Zeit, in: Daniel LAU (ed.), *Gewalt gegen Tiere*, Uchte 2020, pp. 225–242.



disenchanted worldview of Western modernity<sup>18</sup>. Their reading of reality as animated<sup>19</sup> picks up on an unease that Mircea Eliade already linked in his 1950s publication *The Sacred and the Profane* with the observation that many Western Europeans find it difficult to comprehend »that for certain human beings the sacred can be manifested in stones or trees«<sup>20</sup>. Various theological approaches also flirt – sometimes more, sometimes less explicitly – with animistic ideas, and they probably do so in the awareness that the monotheistic religions in particular have deepened and confirmed this division in various ways throughout their history. This famous critique of the Judeo-Christian profanation of the natural environment by Lynn White Jr. has strongly shaped later debates. As an answer to a disenchanted, profaned world completely available to the human species, some newer, theological as well as extra-theological approaches now offer remarkable proposals. Starting from process-theological, panentheistic and indigenous systems of thought and belief, these proposals usually argue for a resacralization of the natural co-world<sup>21</sup>: In doing so, they seek to examine religious teachings for those forgotten strands of tradition that seem to carry the reading of a sacralized or sacralizable environment. Lynn White Jr., himself a convinced Christian, also saw the solution to the problem he described in a »Christian animism« that should be guided by the teachings of St. Francis, who in today's theology is also widely considered as the first Christian animist.

18 David ABRAM, *The Spell of the Sensuous. Perception and Language in a More-Than-Human World*, New York 1997; Tim INGOLD, *The Perception of the Environment: Essays on Livelihood, Dwelling and Skill*, London 2000; Eduardo KOHN, *How Forests Think: Toward an Anthropology Beyond the Human*, Berkeley 2013; Eduardo VIVEIROS DE CASTRO, *The Relative Native: Essays on Indigenous Conceptual Worlds*, Chicago 2016; Philippe DESCOLA, *Beyond Nature and Culture*, Chicago 2014.

19 It is nevertheless important to emphasize that generic statements about indigenous worldviews and accordingly also about animist approaches sometimes obscure important differences; cf. on this Bhagat OINAM, *Revisiting animism. An insider's story of the western discourse*, in: Andreas WEBER (ed.), *Sharing Life. The Ecolitics of Reciprocity*, Berlin 2020, pp. 20–30.

20 Mircea ELIADE, *The Sacred and the Profane. The Nature of Religion*, New York 1959, p. 11.

21 Sally McFAGUE, *The Body of God. An Ecological Theology*, Minneapolis 1993; John HART, *Sacramental Commons: Christian Ecological Ethics*, Oxford 2006; Aurica JAX, »And wisdom became matter«. Materialist explorations of the Cosmic Body of Christ, in: Ead. / Saskia WENDEL (eds.), *Envisioning the Cosmic Body of Christ. Embodiment, Plurality, and Incarnation*, London 2020, pp. 7–20. While the previously mentioned approaches certainly link panentheism with strong animal ethical demands, a contrary example comes from the U.S. theologian Eric D. Meyer, who in a contribution on theological ecologies goes so far as to sketch God himself as analogous to the figure of a hunter who helps himself to his creation and in this respect also serves to legitimize that form of violence against animals, which is usually called hunting. Eric D. MEYER, *Hoc est corpus meum: Theological Ecologies of Creaturely Health in the Context of a Global Pandemic*, in: *Concilium* 4 (2022), pp. 62–71.

With regard to the new developments thus initiated, pantheism should be mentioned first and foremost, i. e., a theistic theology that understands creaturely reality as part of God and is often understood as a theological bridgehead to an animistic understanding of nature. In this sense, pantheistic approaches, which have become very popular within Christian theologies, have made it their habit to pose the question of the »divine within or behind the creature«. The style of Pope Francis' encyclical *Laudato Si'*, which is often received as an »environmental encyclical«<sup>22</sup>, also shows clear animistic tendencies, which are particularly evident in the personalization of natural entities (»our sister, Mother Earth«) – only animals are not personalized in the encyclical at all. *Laudato Si'*, therefore, is the most prominent example of the central problem of a Christian animism, which is almost always pantheistically grounded: for as benevolent and nature-romantic the text appears, for animals, it is not only fruitless but rather an acute danger.

This criticism has at least two aspects: Pantheistic approaches, which implicitly or explicitly place themselves in line with animistic forms of thought, are (1.) unproductive for animals insofar as animals appear surprisingly rarely in them (and the above-mentioned quotation from Eliade already points to this blind spot!): Although they show the most diverse references to landscapes, plants, ecological systems, and sometimes even inanimate formations – animals are very rarely mentioned as subjects. While ferns, mosses, rivers, and lakes are the animist's favorite child – even in modern journals dedicated to indigenous knowledge systems and the »New Animism« – animals hardly ever appear<sup>23</sup>. Pope Francis, for example, describes the life of his namesake with the words that St. Francis lived »in wonderful harmony with God with others, with nature and with himself« (LS 10) – animals are not explicitly mentioned here and in many other places, are left out or subsumed

22 The German translation of the encyclical was given precisely this subtitle (»Die Umwelt-Enzyklika des Papstes«) by the Herder publishing house; the theological reception also echoes this understanding. Markus VOGT, *Christliche Umweltethik. Grundlagen und zentrale Herausforderungen*, Freiburg i. Br. 2021.

23 A recent German publication addressing the (New) Animism contains an article whose title already reveals this blank space: Hermann E. OTT, *Wieso auch Flüsse und Pflanzen juristische Rechte haben [Why rivers and plants have legal rights, too]*, in: Thomas OBERENDER (ed.), *Down to Earth. Entwürfe für eine neue Kultur der Nachhaltigkeit*, Leipzig 2021, pp. 66–81. The author does indeed briefly mention animal rights in his contribution – but this happens exclusively in the context of rights that are intended to protect animal species and that are aimed at species conservation programs. *Individual* rights are not meant here. The animistic ductus of these approaches thus obscures precisely the crucial dialectic: all too often it is accompanied by an objectification of precisely those beings for whose recognition as persons there is far stronger evidence than in the case of rivers, landscapes, ferns, and moss. Nevertheless, there are also exceptions to this blindness towards animals. Cf. Thom van DOOREN, *The Wake of Crows: Living and Dying in Shared Worlds*, New York 2019; Deborah BIRD ROSE, *Wild Dog Dreaming: Love and Extinction*, Charlottesville 2011.

under the already highly problematic term »nature«. Animism, whether it is *new* or supposedly Christian, seems therefore downright blind to the animal eye – and this blindness, it seems to me, is systematic.

Panentheistic and animistic approaches to animals are also (2.) unproductive in normative terms. For even where animals are mentioned, the supposed paradigm shift towards a panentheistic or animistic understanding leads either to extremely insignificant or to no positive normative consequences for them at all – *Laudato Si'* is once again an excellent example here: Where the encyclical, rarely enough, touches on concrete questions of action – the consumption of animals, the problem of vivisection, for example – it becomes very clear that it argues completely conventionally at these points, and, moreover, inculcates the anthropocentric norms of the Catechism<sup>24</sup> once again. In no. 130 of the encyclical, for example, Francis refers to the Catechism and takes up the ostensibly animal-friendly demand that animals should not »suffer or die needlessly«. However, as the subsequent statements show, this demand soon translates into the conviction that, for example, vivisection is morally acceptable as long as it is accompanied by an unspecified »religious respect for the integrity of creation« and brings benefits for humans.

This shows that the encyclical does *not* significantly exceed the level of the Catechism. Both documents declare animals to be a killable good as long as their death serves humans. Other side remarks within the encyclical, which suggest a more positive perception of non-human animals, should be measured against the fact that here, in all clarity, the Catechism is made the norm. Thus, the impression remains that the encyclical, contrary to or rather in line with its animistic connotations, remains entirely conventional with regard to the normative relevance of other animals<sup>25</sup>.

24 The Catechism of the Catholic Church, which was last updated in 1997 and which, according to its self-understanding, constitutes a normatively binding statement of the Christian faith, formulates rigorously on the relationship between humans and animals: »God entrusted animals to the stewardship of those whom he created in his own image. Hence it is legitimate to use animals for food and clothing. They may be domesticated to help man in his work and leisure. Medical and scientific experimentation on animals is a morally acceptable practice, if it remains within reasonable limits and contributes to caring for or saving human lives. It is contrary to human dignity to cause animals to suffer or die needlessly. It is likewise unworthy to spend money on them that should as a priority go to the relief of human misery. One can love animals; one should not direct to them the affection due only to persons«. Catechism Commission of the Roman Catholic Church, Catechism of the Catholic Church, no. 2417, no. 2418, URL: <[https://www.vatican.va/archive/ENG0015/\\_INDEX.HTM](https://www.vatican.va/archive/ENG0015/_INDEX.HTM)> (06-12-2023).

25 One would even have to argue that the encyclical relativizes the violence against animals justified by the catechism even *more* by aestheticizing it. Vivisection and genetic manipulation are understood here as an expression of creativity and artistic freedom (!) and are thus rendered almost invisible: In the same section of the encyclical and with respect to the question of vivisection and genetic manipulations on animals, Francis writes: »Human creativity cannot be suppressed. If an artist cannot be prevented from

The verdict remains the same if the (new) animistic drafts are systematically questioned as to what normative consequences and value they concretely yield for non-human animals. On the face of it, these approaches seem quite promising; after all, they already hint at overcoming the anthropocentrism that is becoming more and more of a problem today by extending the concept of personhood far beyond humans to other beings and considering almost all of reality as animate. Fatally, however, it is precisely the flip side of this almost limitless expansion of these crucial concepts that raises questions: Why, for instance, should a stone be considered as animate as a bat? If simply everything is ensouled, then ethical considerations lead either to complete arbitrariness or to (factual or apparent) dilemmas, which are then compensated for by ideas of a symbolic exchange, which again are likely to be thoroughly insignificant for the respective animal individuals. In the worst case, such worldviews, like many Western ecological discourses, contribute to naturalizing violence against animals – and exactly this circumstance might very often motivate the western preference for a recourse to indigenous and animistic ideas. Thus, also relational worldviews, which are undoubtedly ecologically beneficial (have to) represent an at least praxeological primacy of humans over those animals that are used by humans. In this sense, Kai Horsthemke, for example, notes with regard to the indigenous epistemologies he studied that »an environmentally friendly view may not necessarily (indeed, often does not) incorporate any direct concern for individual non-human animals«<sup>26</sup>. In addition to those approaches that critically classify the ecological relevance of indigenous knowledge systems<sup>27</sup>, their animal ethical and political implications should also be critically discussed. Precisely because animism is so often discussed as a scheme that promises healing from anthropocentrism and thus suggests a closeness to the concern of valuing non-human animals, it should

using his creativity, neither should those who possess special gifts for the advancement of science and technology be prevented from using their God-given talents for the service of others« (ibid., no. 131).

26 Kai HORSTHEMKE, African Communalism, persons, and the case of non-human animals, in: *Filosofia Theoretica. Journal of African Philosophy, Culture and Religions* 7/2 (2018), pp. 60–78, at p. 73.

27 Claire Jean KIM, Makah Whaling and the (non)ecological Indian, in: Kelly STRUTHERS MONTFORD / Chloë TAYLOR (eds.), *Colonialism and Animality. Anti-Colonial Perspectives in Critical Animal Studies*, London et al. 2020, pp. 51–103, who emphasizes that »claims of tribal identity and culture are both accorded presumptive weight and seen as special pleading against the universalist claims of environmental and animal protection; environmental and animal protection claims, in turn, are cast as racist and imperialist. [...] Native American ontologies, which have always viewed humans, animals, and other beings in nature as all animate and all related (non-dualistically), simultaneously recognize the animal's kinship with the human and the rightness of killing animals for food« (ibid., pp. 51f.).

therefore be all the more surprising that it leaves perhaps the most important question untouched, why an astonishingly strict boundary between humans and (other) animals is drawn again at the latest when it comes to the question of who is allowed to kill and eat whom.

If we look at the lines of development of profaned and resacralized animals that have been briefly reconstructed here, then a quite clear result emerges: neither of the two strategies or developments is of any significant advantage for the animals themselves. It seems that in the monotheistic religions both radically profaned *and* resacralized animals share one and the same fate: They are killed and eaten by humans, as it is exemplified by the biblical story of the Golden Calf. This observation thus leads to the structural dilemma that both sacralization and desacralization processes, even if they are explicitly designed to dissolve hierarchies, apparently fail to undermine the most fundamental hierarchy – what remains, in both cases, is the difference between edible animal bodies and non-edible human bodies: a distinction, which, besides, was not questioned by »Chief Animist« St. Francis either. Since this commonality raises questions about the theological significance of sacralization and desacralization processes, the following chapter will discuss the religious problem of *decreation* as a methodological key for the relation of sanctity and edibility.

## 5. DecrEATing Animals: Edibility and Sanctity / Profanity

Assuming, then, that neither the sacralization of animals (which makes them suitable for use in religious cult) nor their profanation / desacralization (which degrades them to mere consumables) has brought and continues to bring real value for these animals, a fundamental question arises: Does changing the normative meaning of animals by readjusting their status within a religious scale ranging from »profane« to »sacred«, therefore miss the internal logics of at least the monotheistic religions? What other logics might be suitable for dealing more accurately with the problem of the animal ethics deficiency of the monotheistic religions?

If we return to the story of the Golden Calf, it draws the attention to a central link that was already mentioned at the beginning. Within the story as well as in many other central topoi of the Judeo-Christian tradition, it becomes apparent that the difference between sacred and profane is clearly linked to the practice of consumption, and this seems to apply in a double-coded sense: the consumption of animals can both testify their profanity and thus their religious insignificance (as in the case of the Golden Calf) but at the same time it can also emphasize their cultic capacity and thus their proximity to the sacred

(as in the case of sacrificial animals)<sup>28</sup>. It is precisely this conspicuous semantic ambivalence that I will discuss in conclusion, as well as the closely related fact that this semantic ambivalence is completely un-ambivalent in normative terms as it leads to the interpretation of animals as edible bodies.

Such an emphasis on the dimension of edibility can be found with regard to the narrative of the Golden Calf, for example, in a material-scientific study of this biblical text: Tarcicio Gaitán Briceño, Emigdio Mendoza Fandiño and Piedad Gañán Rojo have examined the scientific realism of the dissolution of the Golden Calf described in Exodus 32 in a study. According to the authors, the symbolic impression of this scene is no reason not to understand the description as at least a conceivable realistic scenario:

With respect to the gold in the mixture, current research does not indicate that the human ingestion of gold particles at the micron level dispersed in a liquid would cause any harm. Furthermore, several researchers have evaluated the use of such liquids for medical application. The upshot seems to be that the mixture could be consumed without toxicological problems and thus could have fulfilled its purpose as a teaching tool for the Israelites<sup>29</sup>.

The material science study pays particular attention to the fact that the biblical text describes the process of dissolving the Golden Calf in water and its subsequent consumption as a process of »decreation«: The Golden Calf was created in three steps and decremented in three steps. In terms of material science, this symmetrical relation of creation and decreation processes also suggests »that Exodus 32:20 could be an ancient reference to the most commented-upon material processes of our day: reducing the size of matter through a top-down approach«<sup>30</sup>. The authors of the study thus interpret the dissolution and consumption of the Golden Calf as a process of »decreation« that is closely linked to the profanation of the cult image. The complete consumption, which is carried out to profane the golden cult image, not only resembles a »classical humiliation ritual both for the faithful – who are forced to ingest an unsavory liquid – and for the idol itself, which is subjected to the human digestive and excretory process«, but still far beyond that it resembles

28 Thomas RUSTER, Tote Tiere auf dem Altar? Erkundigungen über das biblische Tieropfer, in: Simone HORSTMANN et al., *Alles, was atmet. Eine Theologie der Tiere*, Regensburg 2018, pp. 241–260, at p. 242: »In Israel, religious animal sacrifice and meat consumption were inseparably connected; one was only allowed to eat the meat that had been sacrificed beforehand«. Therefore, »the motive behind the frequent sacrifices was to have meat as often as possible«, my translation.

29 Tarcicio Gaitán BRICEÑO et al., The destruction of the golden calf (Ex 32:20). A materials science perspective, in: *Verbum et Ecclesia* 42/1 (2021), pp. 1–7, at p. 6.

30 *Ibid.*, p. 1.

a »total annihilation«<sup>31</sup>: a residue-free annihilating violence is carried out, which seeks to surpass all other forms of the narratives, which are not lacking in acts of violence. Ignacio Ramos-Gay notes in this regard: »By bringing into play different cardinal elements such as fire, earth, water, and wind, which are typical of various purifying rituals, [Moses's] goal is to completely extinguish any shred of existence of his antagonist and restore the sullied spirit«<sup>32</sup>.

Remarkably, there are at the same time fascinating results in religious studies that link the »decreation« of animals not (only) to their profanation, but *also* to their sacralization: Jonathan Klawans, for example, has worked out most clearly that the cult of animal sacrifice in ancient Israel is also to be understood against the background of its »decreative« dimension. Klawans emphasizes that the sacrifice of animals goes far beyond the act of killing them. First of all, the establishment of religious purity as a prerequisite for animal sacrifice must come into closer focus: Religious purity refers to the establishment of freedom from (supposed) sources of contagion for cultic impurity, i. e., from all aspects of being human that seemed least divine and which Klawans brings down to the triad of death, sex, and animality. For the animals to be sacrificed, this meant first that they should be spotless: Neither injured nor blind, mutilated or otherwise deformed animals could be sacrificed – and Klawans additionally notes that these criteria referred to one area of animal corporeality in a salient sense since »there is a particular concern with the wholeness of the male animal's genitalia«<sup>33</sup>, Klawans states with reference to Leviticus 22:17–19 among others. Klawans explains this fixation, which at first seems strange, with the fact that in addition to cultic purity, another prerequisite for the sacrifice of animals was important: only a domesticated animal could be sacrificed, whereby Klawans, following an earlier work by Jonathan Z. Smith, understands domestication particularly as manipulation of the animal body: »Domestication may be defined as the process of human interference in or alteration of the genetics of plants and animals (i. e. selective breeding)«<sup>34</sup>. The control over the body and ultimately the life of animals gained through domestication also had the consequence that »Israel's sacrificial offerings involved animals that are by nature docile, defenseless, and communal (living and reproducing in flocks and herds)«<sup>35</sup>.

31 Ignacio RAMOS-GAY, Animality and Biblical Masculinities in Conflict. Moses and the Golden Calf (Exodus 32), in: *Men and Masculinities* 23/5 (2020), pp. 814–832, at p. 821.

32 *Ibid.*, p. 822.

33 KLAWANS, *Sacrifice*, p. 71.

34 *Ibid.*, p. 69.

35 Klawans also emphasizes here that the supposedly friendly treatment of domesticated animals was never committed to a notion of subjective animal welfare: »The performance of pastoral responsibilities – caring, feeding, protecting and guiding – can easily be understood in light of *imitation Dei*, as can the more dramatic acts of selective

For the question pursued here about the connection between edibility, sanctity, and profanity, it seems crucial to me to note – even beyond Klawan's observations – that the restriction to domesticated animals is linked to another important meaning besides the manipulation of their bodies. Thus, the result of animal defencelessness that Klawan mentions has the flip side that only those animals were admitted into the realm of the sanctuary that could hardly be physically dangerous to humans. But here, too, it would be necessary to specify this aspect – after all, it takes only little imagination to understand that domesticated cattle, for example, can certainly represent a real source of physical danger to humans. What was clearly eliminated with the domestication of (sacrificial) animals, however, was another decisive factor: animals capable of cult were not predators – no animals that could become a danger to humans *by eating them*. With the suitability to religious cult of domesticated animals, not only their edibility was consolidated but vice versa also the non-edibility of human bodies. If it is true that »the category *human* comes with the privilege of an untouchable corporeality«<sup>36</sup>, then precisely this decidedly »corporeal« difference of man, which is often assumed by theological tradition even until today can be regarded as an important aspect of observation for the relation between sanctity and animality<sup>37</sup>.

Klawan also connects his analysis of the animal sacrifice cult in ancient Israel with further observations that seem to point to a »somatic difference«<sup>38</sup> between humans and animals: While the production of ritual purity already led people to separate themselves from what made them least God-like, the selection process itself could also be indebted to the motif of *Imitatio Dei*. The biblical book of Leviticus in particular draws frequent connections between the human ability to make differences and the divine power to do likewise, so that the selection of sacrificial animals according to strict criteria corresponded above all to a human selfsacralization: »Clearly, the process of selection too can be understood in light of the concern to imitate God«<sup>39</sup>. Some-

breeding« (ibid., p. 72). Klawan concludes: »Those who would seek to equate the value of people and animals would find little support for their views in the literature and rituals of ancient Israel« (ibid., p. 74).

36 Cf. Erika MURPHY, *Devouring the Human. Digestion of a Corporeal Soteriology*, in: Stephen D. MOORE (ed.), *Divinanimality. Animal Theory, Creaturely Theology*, New York 2014, pp. 51–62, at p. 51.

37 Simone HORSTMANN, *Anima (de-)forma corporis. Zur Konstruktion von Tier- und Menschenkörpern durch die Theologie*, in: Ead. (ed.), *Religiöse Gewalt an Tieren*, pp. 59–76; ead., *Die somatische Differenz. Zu den theologischen Bedingungsstrukturen einer Anatomie des Tierkörpers*, in: *Ökumenische Rundschau* 22/3 (2021), pp. 333–345.

38 Ead., *Anthropocene and Somatic Difference. Reflections on the Man-Made Modelling of Worlds and Bodies*, in: Andreas KREBS (ed.), *Rethinking Theology in the Anthropocene*, Darmstadt 2023 (forthcoming).

39 KLAWANS, *Sacrifice*, p. 71.



thing similar also applies to the subsequent killing and dismemberment as well as the eating of the animals: the sacrificer not only had the task of killing the respective animal, but also of dismembering it and thereby looking inside the body – just as God himself is described in many biblical references as the one who – in a quite literal sense – »searches the heart« (Jeremiah 17:10). For example, Isaiah 34:6 presents God not only with bloodstained clothing, but downright as a butcher: »The sword of the LORD drips with their blood and fat, as it drips with the blood of lambs and goats at the slaughter, as it is covered with the kidney fat of rams. For in Bozrah, the capital of Edom, the LORD celebrates a sacrificial feast. Yes, in all Edom it is a great day of slaughter«.

Klawans asks, in light of such textual findings: »Can we infer from these images that the priest – by looking into the animal, and by spattering or manipulating its blood – is doing divine work?«<sup>40</sup> This question is all the more urgent because God himself is repeatedly presented in the bible as eating or consuming:

Perhaps the biblical God does not rely on food the same way people do (Ps 50,12f), but God certainly does »consume« – and the difference between »eating« and »consuming« exists only in our translations, not in the original Hebrew. Throughout biblical narrative, God appears to the Israelites as a »consuming fire«<sup>41</sup>.

Klawans thus highlights the extraordinary proximity between fire and consumption:

Therefore, by consuming and burning elements of sacrificial offerings, the offerers of sacrifice in ancient Israel are imitating activities often attributed to God in narratives in which God's presence during a sacrifice is explicitly described. [...] Closer to the altar, the selection, killing, dissection, and consumption of sacrificial animals are also activities with analogues in the divine realm. God too selects, kills, looks inside things, and appears on earth as consuming fire<sup>42</sup>.

For this reason, too, both the profanating forms of consuming violence and the sacrificial rituals that take cultic animals into the sphere of the sanctuary equally bear the biopolitical signature of *decreation*: The sacrificer who imitates God divides the sacrifice »into its constituent parts. He decreates it«<sup>43</sup>.

40 Ibid.

41 Ibid., p. 72.

42 Ibid., p. 73.

43 Ibid., p. 71.

## 6. Sacrality and Edibility: A Retrospective

Undoubtedly, much more could be said about the deep religious-historical interconnections of animal edibility, sacralization, and desacralization processes. However, the observations gathered here should suffice for at least a preliminary conclusion. So why is the Golden Calf eaten / consumed (and not only destroyed, symbolically killed, etc.)? And what can be seen in this biblical narrative that is at the same time exemplary for today's discussions about the de- / resacralization of non-human life within the Anthropocene?

The preceding considerations have attempted to first make room for an essential irritation: For while a sacralization of the non-human environment, or at least its stronger association with transcendence, appears today for example in the context of »New Animism« as a tried and tested means of counteracting the perception of a completely disenchanted nature, the biblical narrative possibly highlights the theologically problematic nature of this concern: For while animals are associated here with processes of both sacralization (animal sacrifice) and desacralization (destruction of the Golden Calf), the normative quintessence *does not change* in either case. Significantly, both the radically profaned Golden Calf *and* the sacrificial animals that are capable of cult and thus associated with holiness are threatened with one and the same fate: They are considered edible (or more precisely: are *made* edible by the respective context) and their consumption thereby consolidates their respective status as sacred sacrifice or profaned cult image. This surprising commonality was then mirrored in current discourses: While the problem of radically profaned animals today probably finds a depressing echo primarily in the context of industrial animal husbandry, it has nevertheless become apparent that even those contexts that in different ways provide impulses for a resacralization of nature almost tragically do not escape the phenomenon of consuming violence against animals: Random insights into corresponding discourses and texts (»New Animism«, *Laudato Si'*) have shown that even today's new approaches within and outside the theologies continue this tradition almost unbroken. Even where they bring strong rhetorics of a resacralized nature into play, they remain decidedly conventional with regard to the normative consequences for animals. Therefore, a final part of the contribution dealt with discussing the edibility of animals and, more specifically, the religious understanding of »decreation« as a methodological key to this ambivalence. Thus, both sacralization and desacralization processes involving animals seem to be structurally linked precisely in the monotheistic religions: Both »decreate« animals, thus not only ensure their complete consumability through their complete dismemberment and utilization, but also establish it in the first place. This leaves us with the provisional conclusion that theological discourses, which, in order to valorize other animals, are exclusively bound to the guiding distinction

between sacred and profane, tragically overlook their common and highly problematic intersection: As long as animals are considered edible here and there, as long as their consumability is confirmed by theologically moderated processes of desacralization as well as sacralization alike, all other strategies for a fundamental new understanding of animal life necessarily reinforce the status quo of an ultimately religiously impregnated and legitimized violence against animals. Since theologies are so strongly tied to (their) traditions and understand them as normatively binding, this tie back possibly obscures their view of the fact that a sustainable human-animal relationship can be based on existing traditions only to a very limited extent. Rather, it seems to me, they would have to accept that the attempt to live together with other animals – as peacefully as possible and accordingly without regarding them as a source of food – is a new and unprecedented form of relationship in the history of mankind. Projecting it nevertheless on existing traditions or deriving it from these therefore appears to be rather problematic.



## V. EPILOGUE



Johannes Paulmann

## Sacralization

### Historical Concepts and Practices

The heuristic concept of sacralization captures the social attribution of sacredness, that is, the authentication of what is supremely valuable to a group, society or culture. Sacralization is based on historical practices, with which collectives, through linguistic and non-linguistic actions, determined both the boundaries between transcendence and immanence and the realisation of the transcendent in the immanent<sup>1</sup>. Spaces, objects, actions, times or ideas were declared unavailable or non-negotiable through processes of sacralization, the ultimate values acquired a binding force with regard to meaning and norms, and the sacred had a community-founding and power-stabilising effect<sup>2</sup>. As a process of change, sacralization involved both desacralization and re-sacralization.

For historical research, a generic concept of sacralization is conducive to new insights because it is able to detach the process from religion in terms of content and institution. In this way, other cultural, social and political areas, in which fundamental values were considered unavailable, guiding action and legitimising order can be analysed in a way that explains the special collective and individual binding power of historically changing and competing ideas. At the same time, a generic concept makes it possible to explore the purposeful shaping of sacrality – by certain actors, through mechanisms, structures and processes of change. In a cross-epochal perspective, it contributes to interpreting the changes in modern Europe commonly discussed as secularisation as changing relationships between the sacred, the profane and the everyday world, so that religion in modernity is not easily dismissed with reference to its loss of significance. The study of sacralizations in different socio-political fields allows us to examine religion not only in opposition to, but also in the co-existence of systems of interpretation and order. Finally, claims of sacralization that are supposed to legitimise social, politi-

- 1 Magnus SCHLETTE / Volkhard KRECH, Sakralisierung, in: Detlef POLLACK et al. (eds.), *Handbuch Religionssoziologie*, Wiesbaden 2018, pp. 437–463.
- 2 Gordon LYNCH, *The Sacred in the Modern World. A Cultural Sociological Approach*, Oxford 2012.

cal or ecclesiastical order can be critically questioned. Thus, a cultural study understanding of the sacred as the result of a communicative and conflictual process replaces the question of true or false sacredness and makes historical practices, with which social groups and instances authenticated ultimate values and constructed social reality, the object of study.

## 1. Sacralization – a History of Terms and Concepts

Etymologically, the term sacralization is related to the Latin verb *sancire* (to limit, enclose, sanctify). In Roman antiquity, *sanctio* referred to the demarcation of sacred sites. The German *heilig* (sacred) or *Heiligkeit* (sanctity), i. e. particular or ownership, took over the meaning of the Latin word field of *sanctus*: what belongs to the deity as property is consecrated to it and thus sacred<sup>3</sup>. As a contrasting term, »profane« also derives from Roman usage for that, which is in front of the sanctified precinct (*fanum*). This distinction is not to be understood as a sharp separation of the sacred and the profane. Rather, the peculiarity of the religious is based precisely on the paradox of the religious interpretive structure: religion refers to transcendence and symbolically marks the difference from everyday life or the mundane, but at the same time anchors its world interpretations in everyday life and sees the transcendent at work there<sup>4</sup>. Particularly distinguished sacred media and actions, recognized as authentic, are needed to make the transcendent tangible for people.

Religious terms were inherently contradictory and contested, so that their mutual determination changed at least since the beginning of the modern era<sup>5</sup>. Complementary to *sacer* or »consecrated«, »profane« repeatedly stood for a hostile opposite that opposed or contaminated true religion. In the wake of the Reformation, Calvinist scholars of the 17th century polemically sharpened this opposition of »sacred« and »profane« by stating that true worship excluded the use of representations of God or saints. Their theological-antiquarian research on the origins of religion and its relation to sacrilege led them at the same time to historical and comparative considerations of religion that pointed ahead to a functional, quasi-sociological concept of

3 Günther LANCKOWSKI, Heiligkeit I: Religionsgeschichtlich, in: Theologische Realenzyklopädie, vol. 14, Berlin 1985, pp. 695–697.

4 Niklas LUHMANN, Die Ausdifferenzierung der Religion, in: Id., Gesellschaftsstruktur und Semantik. Studien zur Wissenssoziologie der modernen Gesellschaft, vol. 3, Frankfurt a. M. 1989, pp. 259–357, at p. 271.

5 Lucian HOELSCHER, Religiöse Begriffe im Widerspruch. Ein Versuch zur semantischen Struktur religiöser Sprache, in: Schweizerische Zeitschrift für Religions- und Kulturgeschichte 107 (2013), pp. 367–387.



religion that no longer equated religion with Christianity but understood it as a universal form of social action<sup>6</sup>. As a result, the combative opposition between »sacred« and »profane« was neutralized: The profane no longer necessarily threatened the sacred, but merely marked a difference from secular, everyday life.

For the European understanding of the sacred, in addition to confessional polemics and theological scholarship, the perception of non-Christian religious practices played an important role in the course of overseas expansionist efforts. Portuguese navigators in the 15th century assigned the term *feitiço* (man-made, magical object; fetish) to objects to which the West African population attributed special powers. They took up a word field of their own language that denoted powerful things and practices that the church and state at home fought against as deviations from the true faith<sup>7</sup>. In this way, they classified sacred objects of a foreign culture in a religious scheme of right and wrong, similar to how Protestant travelogues polemically equated African with Catholic practices in order to disqualify the latter.

Beyond such intra-Christian denominational uses, the confrontation with overseas magical objects provided an opportunity for a fundamental critique of religion. The worship of inanimate objects or animals appeared to Enlightenment progressive thinkers as the result of a popular inability to rationally explain disturbing anomalies such as natural forces, disease, or other misfortunes. Fetishism, a word coined by Charles de Brosses in 1760, was considered an early stage of religion on the way to monotheistic religions. Reference to fetishism of others could be used at the same time to criticize superstitious practices in Europe itself, certain forms of Christianity, or even religion in general<sup>8</sup>. The term was therefore central to determining what was considered sacred in its religiously marginalizing, temporally grading, and spatially separating function. During the 19th century, it came into use outside the religious sphere, as the »fetish character of the commodity« in Karl Marx's critique of capitalism or in the »sexual fetishism« of clinical psychology in Jean-Martin Charcot, Alfred Binet, and Sigmund Freud, and thus became a socially critical term for collective deception or individual deviance.

Around 1900, scholars of religion and social scientists partially detached sacrality from Christian theological discourse by developing it into a heuristic concept. They initially sharpened the distinction between sacred and profane through a universal and analytical definition of religion. Here the back-

6 Jonathan SHEEHAN, Sacred and Profane. Idolatry, Antiquarianism and the Polemics of Distinction in the Seventeenth Century, in: Past and Present 192 (2006), pp. 35–66.

7 Karl-Heinz KOHL, Die Macht der Dinge. Geschichte und Theorie sakraler Objekte, München 2003, pp. 13–18, pp. 28f.

8 Ibid., pp. 74–77.

ground was also the imperial and missionary expansion of Europe, which stimulated anthropological, mostly evolutionary notions of the origin and development of religions in two directions. On the one hand, Nathan Söderblom considered holiness more essential than the concept of God in determining religion<sup>9</sup>. Émile Durkheim even declared the sacred to be the central characteristic of religion in general: sacred things represented in condensed form the authority of the traditions they authenticated. Profane things, on the other hand, endangered the sacred, which the sociologist did not want to be understood theologically but as a particular form of behaviour in societies and as an expression of the identity of their members<sup>10</sup>.

In contrast to Durkheim's view that societies created the sacred and the profane in the first place, religious phenomenology determined the sacred as a religious experience that linked people to the divine. Thus, a subjectively felt authenticity came to the fore. In Rudolf Otto's philosophy of religion, the sacred stood for the »wholly other«: religion was an encounter with the »numinous« in the sacred, shaped by feelings<sup>11</sup>. The religious scholar Mircea Eliade called the appearance of the sacred in the profane a hierophany. According to this, sacred breaks into the world, can manifest itself in every object and »opens« the ordinary space and time. Only in the hierophany sacred structures and transcendent orders manifested themselves to the people. However, these could be perceived only by religious people. The more religious a person is, the stronger the tendency to sanctify his life through rites and to realize human existence on »the eternal [level] of substance, of reality« as opposed to the »temporal [level] of becoming, of illusion«. In contrast, Eliade said, is the tendency to resist the sacred experienced as simultaneously attractive and repulsive. He called this resistance to the sacred »flight from authenticity«<sup>12</sup>. Accordingly, it would be authentic to surrender completely to the demand of the sacred.

The dichotomy of »sacred« and »profane« in the sociology and phenomenology of religion is insufficient for historical studies. More recent approaches weaken the dichotomy and emphasize the process by speaking of sacralization as a change in dealing with sacredness. Sociologist of religion Gordon Lynch adds »mundane«, the everyday secular, as a third category to the conceptual distinction between »profane« and »sacred«<sup>13</sup>. While the profane for

9 Nathan SÖDERBLOM, *Holiness (General and Primitive)*, in: *Encyclopedia of Religion and Ethics*, vol. 6, ed. by James HASTINGS, New York 1914, pp. 731–741, at p. 731.

10 Émile DURKHEIM, *Les formes élémentaires de la vie religieuse. Le système totémique en Australie* [1912], Paris <sup>4</sup>1960, p. 65.

11 Rudolf OTTO, *Das Heilige. Über das Irrationale in der Idee des Göttlichen und sein Verhältnis zum Rationalen* [1917], Gotha <sup>14</sup>1926, p. 33 and p. 7.

12 Mircea ELIADE, *Die Religionen und das Heilige. Elemente der Religionsgeschichte* [zuerst frz. 1949, dt. 1954], Frankfurt a. M. 1986, pp. 532f.

13 LYNCH, *The Sacred in the Modern World*, pp. 26–29.

him stands for anything that might threaten or defile the sacred, the everyday mundane is separate from the sacred but is not hostile to it. Desacralization of spaces, objects, or ideas can thus also occur as turning something into an everyday matter without a deliberate profanation. Finally, Lynch's cultural sociology defines sacralization as a process, in which things and ideas are declared or experienced as unavailable / non-negotiable and giving meaning, having community-founding as well as norm-giving effects. Desacralization can thus be understood conversely as a process, in which the sacred becomes negotiable. Specific historical constellations and the respective group- and society-specific demarcations between the sacred, the profane, and the everyday world thus become an object of research that can be explored, for example, through »the management of sacrality«, i. e., the purposeful design of religious spaces, times, things, and ideas<sup>14</sup>. The notion that the sacred is, or should be, beyond human grasp is understood as a regulation, deemed necessary by historical actors, of the distinctiveness of the sacred from the everyday. These concepts, grounded in the history of religion, are applicable to secular phenomena, so that a spectrum of acts of sacralization can also be brought into view that is »neither institutionally nor substantively bound to religion, however it draws on the aura of specifically religious sacredness«<sup>15</sup>.

## 2. Sacralization – Historical Searchlights

The following historical examples take up a systematic classification<sup>16</sup> by first showing processes of sacralization in the religious realm on objects and spaces (veneration of images, relics, and sacred spaces in churches). This is followed by cases of sacralization in the extra-religious sphere on the basis of rituals (consecration of rulers) and leading concepts (nation). Considerations of political and legal borderline cases between the religious and the extra-religious (political religion, civil religion and human rights) conclude the selection. The classification does not assume a process of secularization as a development from religious sacralization to extra-religious sacralization. A comparative consideration of sacralization processes across epochs rather throws new light on the relationship of religions to each other, of religion to politics, society and culture as well as the distinction between religious and non-religious spheres by revealing contrasts, competition as well as the

14 Gerd SCHWERHOFF, Sakralitätsmanagement. Zur Analyse religiöser Räume im späten Mittelalter und in der Frühen Neuzeit, in: Susanne RAU / Gerd SCHWERHOFF (eds.), *Topographien des Sakralen. Religion und Raumordnung in der Vormoderne*, München / Hamburg 2008, pp. 38–68, at p. 41.

15 SCHLETTE / KRECH, *Sakralisierung*, p. 445.

16 *Ibid.*, pp. 445–457.

coexistence of systems of interpretation and order of the sacred. Sacralization or desacralization historically served to legitimize or delegitimize religious, social, and political orders. Authentication was based on the power of actors and instances, but the respective community of »believers« also made or claimed attributions of sacredness themselves through various practices.

Over the centuries, the concrete design of sacred spaces, times, and things in European Christian societies and groups was periodically marked by a tension regarding the pictorial representation of God (and the Son of God)<sup>17</sup>. Disputes over images served internal Christian demarcations as well as to mark differences from other religions, especially Judaism and Islam, which also engaged in debates over imagery<sup>18</sup>. On the one hand, Old Testament monotheism, adopted from Judaism, theologically established a transcendent, omnipotent, and omnipresent, hence invisible God. On the other hand, the Jesus of the New Testament was »the basic figure of the holy«<sup>19</sup>: in him God had become man. How and whether the transcendent God could appear or could be represented in media was the subject of numerous disputes not only among theologians, but also between the authenticating and regulating official church and the theologians as sacral experts on the one hand, and the faithful with their needs for embodiment, localization, and temporalization on the other<sup>20</sup>. Images of saints claim authenticity by referring to mediation through the saint as an exalted and distinguished person, facing the viewer and at the same time removed from reality; and the images possess *virtus* (power)<sup>21</sup>. The iconoclasts, for example, opposed such icons with power of their own when they banned the veneration of images that had been increasing in the Eastern Church since the 7th century. Such measures, however, did not prevent images of saints from being attributed healing power again and again over the course of time.

Relics had the advantage over pictorial artifacts of having once possessed life and power<sup>22</sup>. The cult of relics began with the veneration of early Christian martyrs, but their physical remains were a scarce commodity. There-

17 Reiner SOERRIES, Bilder, Bildverehrung, in: Evangelisches Kirchenlexikon, vol. 1, Göttingen <sup>3</sup>1986, pp. 504–509.

18 Wolfram DREWS, Jewish or Islamic Influence? The Iconoclastic Controversy in Dispute, in: Jörg FEUCHTER et al. (eds.), Cultural Transfers in Dispute. Representations in Asia, Europe and the Arab World since the Middle Ages, Frankfurt a. M. 2011, pp. 41–60.

19 Arnold ANGENENDT, Heilige und Reliquien. Die Geschichte ihres Kultes vom frühen Christentum bis zur Gegenwart, München 1994, p. 32.

20 Hans von CAMPENHAUSEN, Die Bilderfrage als theologisches Problem der Alten Kirche, in: Zeitschrift für Theologie und Kirche 49 (1952), pp. 33–60.

21 Christa BELTING-IHM, Heiligenbild, in: Reallexikon für Antike und Christentum, vol. 14 (1988), pp. 66–96, at p. 69 and p. 82.

22 ANGENENDT, Heilige und Reliquien, p. 187; for what follows pp. 149–166, pp. 214–229; KOHL, Die Macht der Dinge, pp. 44–68.

fore, objects that were believed to have come into contact with Jesus Christ, the Virgin Mary, the apostles or saints during their lifetimes were also considered sacred. These objects could be divided like the body parts, so that they could be venerated in several places. However, this posed the problem of proving the authenticity of the individual parts (skulls, teeth and finger bones or splinters of wood and scraps of cloth). When they were found, something miraculous had to have happened, so the object was linked to a story. In addition, the objects were given an artificial setting that preserved them permanently and made them conspicuously distinguishable from the same but everyday things by the valuable materials used. The reliquary thus established a kind of authenticating original packaging. From the 12th century on, authentication took place through a papal-legal procedure of inscription in the canon of saints. In this way the number of relics could be increased, but at the same time controlled on the part of the church against popular practices. Sacralization formed a dynamic juxtaposition, in and against each other, of pious lay initiative and ecclesiastical-legal procedure, in which the ecclesiastical authorities rejected a large number of claims<sup>23</sup>. Similar negotiation of sacrality, supplemented by governmental-authoritarian and medical authorities, still characterized the authentication of Marian and other saintly apparitions since the 19th century<sup>24</sup>. Gender and thus socio-political power issues played a significant role in the procedures and practice of veneration of saints. This was also evident in the hierarchy of relics: after things that had come into contact with Christ or body parts that had accrued before his ascension (milk teeth, foreskin, or spilled blood), those associated with Mary, the mother of God, were followed by relics of apostles, martyrs, and other lesser saints.

After the late medieval increased veneration of saints and relics, the Reformation brought about changed attributions of sacrality that, despite the iconoclasm and destruction, should not be understood as profanation but rather as a redefinition of the sacred in the world and a changed demarcation between the sacred and the profane<sup>25</sup>. This was evident in the handling of objects, but also in the ideal of spatial, temporal and ritual concentration. With the Protestant rejection of the cult of relics, the numerous side altars in particular lost their sacred significance. All in all, the church

23 Renate KLAUSER, *Zur Entwicklung des Heiligensprechungsverfahrens bis ins 13. Jahrhundert*, in: *Zeitschrift der Savigny-Stiftung für Rechtsgeschichte, Kanonistische Abteilung* 40 (1954), pp. 85–101, at p. 88.

24 David BLACKBOURN, *Marpingen. Apparitions of the Virgin Mary in Bismarckian Germany*, Oxford 1993 and Ruth HARRIS, *Lourdes. Body and Spirit in the Secular Age*, London 1999.

25 Natalie Zemon DAVIS, *The Sacred and the Body Social in Sixteenth-Century Lyon*, in: *Past & Present* 90 (1981), pp. 40–70 and SCHWERHOFF, *Sakralitätsmanagement*, pp. 44–48.

space was supposed to focus the parishioners on faith and piety and was therefore unadorned in radical movements, such as those of the Calvinists or the Herrnhuter Brüdergemeinde. With the elimination of processions, the church space no longer radiated outward; instead of a multitude of masses and devotions, the prominent time of worship now fell on Sundays; and because of the changed understanding of the Lord's Supper, the Eucharist no longer formed a necessary part of the service. In practice, the guiding principles were often not implemented or were implemented with varying degrees of radicalism, depending on the respective Protestant shade. The special dignity of the space, however, did not disappear at all, but moved the preaching pastor into the focus<sup>26</sup>. Purification and concentrated sacrality were reinforced by limiting the multifunctionality of churches, i. e., eliminating their use for everyday, nonreligious liturgical purposes such as ecclesiastical jurisdiction and care of the poor, political-administrative tasks, and business or social concerns<sup>27</sup>. Also in Catholic churches, after the Council of Trent, the congregation was oriented more toward the altar through visual axes and pews, which corresponded to a new visualization strategy of Catholic proselytizing and disciplining<sup>28</sup>.

Sacralization, profanation, and universalization can also be observed historically in secular, non-religious spheres of action. Persons could acquire sacral dignity, for example, when assuming an office. This applied not only to priests or bishops, but also to secular candidates for office. This sacralization of the extra-religious found its outstanding expression in the context of coronation rituals<sup>29</sup>. As late as 1789, the attribute *sacré* adorned the king in the *cahiers de doléances* to the Estates-General. Equally, however, it was now used for the nation, the deputies, or individual rights, expressing a competition and coexistence of sacred ideas of order. The attribution of sacrality to new guiding concepts and collectives in the era of the French Revolution was sensational and consequential, because extra-religious sacralization in the extra-religious sphere could be seen as a principled renunciation of Christian transcendence and, in the nationalization of religion, for example, even reacted on the religious.

26 Renate DUERR, Zur politischen Kultur im lutherischen Kirchenraum. Dimensionen eines ambivalenten Sakralitätskonzepts, in: Renate DUERR / Gerd SCHWERHOFF (eds.), Kirchen, Märkte und Tavernen. Erfahrungs- und Handlungsräume in der Frühen Neuzeit, Frankfurt a. M. 2005, pp. 497–526.

27 SCHWERHOFF, Sakralitätsmanagement, pp. 49–59, at p. 59; Stefan LAUBE, Von der Reliquie zum Ding. Heiliger Ort – Wunderkammer – Museum, Berlin 2011, chapter 1.

28 Ursula BROSSETTE, Die Inszenierung des Sakralen. Das theatralische Raum- und Ausstattungsprogramm süddeutscher Barockkirchen in seinem liturgischen und zeremoniellen Kontext, Weimar 2002, pp. 582–587.

29 Barbara STOLLBERG-RILINGER, Rituale, Frankfurt a. M. 2013, pp. 90–114.

In the course of the 19th century, secular guiding concepts such as reason, fatherland, nation or civilizing mission and authorities such as state, empire or other models of order were given the appearance of being given by God or nature and an eternal character through the application of authentication practices and narratives that resembled religious ones. This gave the values associated with them a validity that was difficult to criticize, strengthened the legitimacy of political orders, and established emotional bonds ranging from loyalty to devotion in sacrificial death. The structural analogy, for example, of the religious and the national, made it possible to speak of a transformation of the sacred without assuming a sacral transfer<sup>30</sup> or a replacement of religion by the sacral nation. This opens up analytical perspectives on political and social phenomena of late modernity: thus, political communities can be conceived as communities of faith and the veneration of national heroes as a cult, or the complex relationship in multinational, ethnic, and religious empires in Central Europe can be studied, where denomination served as a fundamental marker in the process of nation-building<sup>31</sup>.

Divergent assessments of modern secularization played a role in explaining 20th century dictatorships, which were interpreted as political religions in the 1990s on the basis of leader worship, community-building rites, or material promises of salvation. The analogous structural elements of religious and political patterns of meaning seemed indisputable; the question of whether they were religious camouflage or components of a genuine religion was discussed controversially<sup>32</sup>. In addition to the dispute over the theory of totalitarianism, different views about the consequences of secularization lay behind the debate, dating back to the 1930s. In 1938, the Enlightenment-critical Catholic political scientist Eric Voegelin, on the one hand, saw the loss of faith as explaining the population's susceptibility to mass ideological movements because they satisfied ever-present religious needs. The liberal philosopher Raymond Aron, on the other hand, described dictatorships as religions in 1939 because he saw the same tendencies toward totalitarian community formation at work in both. In this view, religiosity that was directed against liberal currents actually aided and abetted the totalitarian regimes of the 20th century.

30 Friedrich Wilhelm GRAF, *Sakraltransfer*, in: *Religion in Geschichte und Gegenwart*, vol. 7, Tübingen 42004, pp. 748f.

31 Martin SCHULZE WESSEL (ed.), *Nationalisierung der Religion und Sakralisierung der Nation im östlichen Europa*, Stuttgart 2006.

32 Hans Günter HOCKERTS, *War der Nationalsozialismus eine politische Religion? Über Chancen und Grenzen eines Erklärungsmodells*, in: Klaus HILDEBRAND (ed.), *Zwischen Politik und Religion. Studien zur Entstehung, Existenz und Wirkung des Totalitarismus*, München 2003, pp. 45–71.

These positions formed the expression of a debate that theologians, sociologists, and historians had been conducting since the period around 1900<sup>33</sup>. In them, a differentiation of the concept of religion emerged, as, for example, the Protestant theologian Paul Tillich had done in 1929, when he described the »non-church religions« nationalism, communism, and capitalism as »typical forms of autonomous religion« and distinguished them as romantic-conservative, utopian-revolutionary, and critical-skeptical types<sup>34</sup>. Not related to dictatorships was the variation of political religion, which later became conceptually coined as »civil religion« (Robert Bellah), especially in the United States<sup>35</sup>. Against the background of the separation of church and state, civil religion here referred to the way, in which a religion was created for a political polity through general references to faith (God, destiny, mission), veneration of writings (Constitution, Declaration of Independence) and personalities (outstanding presidents), and rituals (inauguration). In this way, a kind of abstract religion was established that made it possible to integrate many different religions without completely dispensing with religious references. One could call civil religion, by extension of Tillich, an abstract-integrative type that was essentially shaped by the Protestantism of white America. The concept of civil religion is difficult to transfer to other national circumstances because of the historically different state-church relations<sup>36</sup>.

Finally, in his »new genealogy of human rights,« sociologist Hans Joas makes an attempt to establish a generalized form of sacrality by following Durkheim in understanding the dynamics of human rights discourse since the late 18th century as »a history of the sacralization of the person«<sup>37</sup>. He shows how collective sensitivity to the experience of violence and the universalization of (Christian) morality were linked in lawmaking. His theses could be pointedly seen as an example of a scholarly effort to authenticate the sacrality of the person, for the author is concerned with an »affirmative genealogy« as a way of bringing historically formed ideals to life<sup>38</sup>.

33 Christian Johannes NEDDENS, »Politische Religion«. Zur Herkunft eines Interpretationsmodells totalitärer Ideologien, in: *Zeitschrift für Theologie und Kirche* 109/3 (2012), pp. 307–336.

34 Paul TILlich, *Nichtkirchliche Religionen* (1929), in: Id., *Die Frage nach dem Unbedingten. Schriften zur Religionsphilosophie, Ges. Werke*, vol. 5, ed. by Renate ALBRECHT, Berlin 1987, pp. 13–31.

35 Robert N. BELLAH, *Civil Religion in America*, in: *Daedalus* 96 (1967), pp. 1–21; Carsten Bagge LAUSTSEN, *Studying Politics and Religion. How to Distinguish Religious Politics, Civil Religion, Political Religion, and Political Theology*, in: *Journal of Religion in Europe* 6 (2013), pp. 428–463.

36 On the more recent German discussion: Horst DREIER, *Staat ohne Gott. Religion in der säkularen Moderne*, München 2018.

37 Hans JOAS, *Die Sakralität der Person. Eine neue Genealogie der Menschenrechte*, Berlin 2011, pp. 16–18.

38 *Ibid.*, pp. 147–203.



The reflections on political religion and the sacrality of the person touch on the overarching question of the relationship of social and political orders to transcendence in the sense of principles and concepts of the unconditioned that precede them. Transcendence has mostly been attributed to religions, but for modern history from the late 18th century onward, the question of inner-worldly transcendence also arises<sup>39</sup>. In addition to political worldviews, one could think, for example, of the religion of art, in the context of which humans were supposed to have a share in the sacred through the subjective aesthetic experience of the beautiful and sublime<sup>40</sup>. Historical museums offered a changing reference over the eras to the nation, to civic values, or at present to the values of a civil religion<sup>41</sup>. Other ideas that have been made essentially hyperbolically applicable were reason, progress, technology, or nature. They competed with each other and served to symbolically cope with or establish unavailability, non-negotiability by means of myths, cultic acts, and rituals. And they developed in tension with the claim of (Christian) religion, which has lost its primacy in the European societies over the last two centuries or so. What is new is not the conflictual coexistence of the religious and the secular in dealing with holiness. Religion, however, finds itself in an intensified competition with other systems of demarcation between the everyday and the sacred. The historical study of sacralization provides nuanced insights into the process commonly referred to as secularization. A generic concept of sacralization in the sense of an interrelation of processes of sacralization and desacralization allows us to capture collective attributions of sacredness from religious to extra-religious realms. Sacralization thus belongs to the social practices with which »ultimate« values were and are authenticated by groups and instances<sup>42</sup>.

39 Hans VORLAENDER, *Transzendenz und die Konstitution politischer Ordnungen. Eine Einführung in systematischer Absicht*, in: Id. (ed.), *Transzendenz und die Konstituierung von Ordnungen*, Berlin 2013, pp. 1–42.

40 Hermann DEUSER et al. (eds.), *Metamorphosen des Heiligen. Struktur und Dynamik von Sakralisierung am Beispiel Kunstreligion*, Tübingen 2015.

41 Achim SAUPE, *Berührungsreliquien. Die geschichtlich-religiöse Aufladung des Authentischen im historischen Museum*, in: Thomas ESER et al. (eds.), *Authentisierung im Museum. Ein Werkstatt-Bericht*, Mainz 2017, pp. 45–58.

42 This essay is a translated and revised version of Johannes PAULMANN, *Sakralisierung*, in: Martin SABROW / Achim SAUPE (eds.), *Handbuch Historische Authentizität*, Göttingen 2022, pp. 435–443; the author wishes to express his thanks for permission to the editors and publishers.



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