

RSG 1/2003

## Autoritäres und totalitäres Denken in Deutschland Authoritarian and Totalitarian Ideologies in Germany

Gerhard Besier: Pastorennationalismus und autoritärer Staat. Politische „Glaubenskulturen“ im deutschen Protestantismus während der 20er und 30er Jahre

From the Protestant associations founded in the last third of the 19<sup>th</sup> century some national-liberal, resp. “modern-positive”, milieus emerged whose powerful position and social prestige was closely related to their acceptance of the monarchistic (Wilhelminian) form of society. For these groups, social democrats, Catholics, “sects”, associations of freethinkers and, for some, also Jews were a threat to the predominant Protestant culture. Such collective sentiments increased to a widespread mentality of crisis after the defeat of 1918 and gave rise to the urge to join national-conservative “movements” in order to escape the ongoing process of marginalization. As a consequence thereof, a further politicization and ideologization of religiousness followed. The forced emigration of church members from Protestant institutions appeared to the church leaders as a proof for the “moral-ethical decline” of the German people altogether. While traditional church piety hardly had any resonance anymore, religious-political mixtures seemed to carry away ministers and laypersons alike. In view of this perception, many church leaders, pastors and theologians were only too ready to renew the traditional synthesis of Protestantism and nationalism in alliance with the new, strong state. However, National Socialism broke up the old successful concept with Protestantism, since it wanted to develop a “political religion” without traditional religious supports. Humiliated, since rejected, Protestantism thus lost all possibilities of shaping society until 1945.

Uwe Backes: „Totalitäres Denken“ – Konzeptgeschichte, Merkmale und herrschaftspraktische Wirkungen

In spite of the early and constant emphasis on the meaning of the ideological foundations of the totalitarian rule, the mental architecture of the value and orientation systems in question has been taken into consideration far less intensively than the organization of the power apparatus. Whereas the rule model of totalitarianism has remained the subject of critical discussion and continuing development, one has kept far away from working out a corresponding ideology model. This article seeks to throw light on the term “totalitarian thought”. It sketches the early attempts of its conceptualization and particularly acknowledges the concept of “political religions” and the contributions of “critical rationalism”. The most important findings will be assembled and, in closing, the practical consequences of the rule of “totalitarian thought” discussed, using the “real existing socialism” as an example.

Gerhard Barkleit: Selbstverwirklichung in Weltanschauungsdiktaturen – der Erfinder, Wissenschaftler und Unternehmer Manfred von Ardenne

On the person of Manfred von Ardenne, inventor, scientist and entrepreneur, it will be demonstrated that, aside from competence, creativity and willingness toward risktaking, a personal arrangement with the powers that be was also a necessary prerequisite for success in totalitarian dictatorships. Two levels will be considered on which Ardenne came to an arrangement with those in power in politics and the society: in the participation in projects of strategic importance as well as in the setting up and cultivation of personal connections. In the national socialist Third Reich both levels played a role. In the Soviet Union under Stalin, von Ardenne took part in the development of the Soviet atom bomb, and in the GDR he succeeded in becoming a “model scientist” and in mobilizing the resources necessary for the implementation of his ideas by setting up resilient relationships to leading officials of the government party.

Lothar Fritze: Rechtfertigen, Entschuldigen, Vorwerfen. Zur Theorie des moralischen Urteilens

This contribution will try to use the „three-step crime structure“, well-known from the German criminal law dogma, productively concerning questions of moral judgment. According to German criminal law, punishment can only be imposed if the act constitutes the characteristic features of an offence, is unlawful and culpable. The analysis shows that there exist far-reaching analogies between legal and moral judgment. Thereby, the characteristics of the moderation of the features of an offence, unlawfulness and culpability, also receive attention in the practice of moral judgment. To voice a reprimand implies three claims: The individual has violated a socially accepted moral norm; this violation of the norm was not justified; this inappropriate behavior is subjectively reprehensible. The structure of the moral judgment results in three defense strategies. The application of these strategies is examined on the basis of defense argumentations as is well-known from the „reappraisal“ of the communist systems.

Richard Singelenberg: Persecution and Resistance of Jehovah’s Witnesses During the Nazi-Regime (Edited by Hans Hesse. Edition Temmen / Courier Press 2001. Pp. 405. \$39.95. ISBN: 3-861-08750-2), Review Article

Irrespective of the shortcomings mentioned above, this book fills a gap in descriptive contemporary history. By its focus on a forgotten group of Holocaust victims it has succeeded to unveil an extremely traumatic period of their past. It illuminates the tremendous suffering of a religious minority that refused to yield to an oppressor that could not allow an alternative authoritarian, allegedly Jewish-Bolshevik worldview within the boundaries of its totalitarian state. Moreover, both systems promulgated competing ideologies of salvation, an anathematized constellation in the eyes of the Nazis that could only be solved by ruthlessly crushing the movement. Yet, the regime never managed to paralyse the JWs completely, thus illustrating the effects of the mechanisms of millenarian commitment and the power of faith when the believer is

besieged, his or her very existence threatened. Therefore, seemingly paradoxically, for some this harrowing period still brings about an ambiguous nostalgia, like this elderly JW, who, while observing the easygoing conduct of the youthful generation of his fellow-believers during a recent WBTS convention in the Netherlands, sighed “it’s about time for a war to break out”.

#### Johannes Wrobel: Die Verfolgung der Zeugen Jehovas im Nationalsozialismus – Rezeption, Rezension, Interpretation

From the beginning of the Hitler era in 1933, Jehovah’s Witnesses (International Bible Students Association, hereafter JW) were banned and experienced an ever-escalating program of Nazi persecution through State and societal mechanisms, including concentration camp imprisonment. Why target such a minority? Because JW refused to cease their religious activity, stayed politically neutral, rejected National Socialism and its ideology, and because they were a living example of the equality-of-races doctrine. Within the concentration camp system the Bible Students constituted a separate prisoner category, which the SS stigmatized by a “purple triangle”. Those prisoners could have bought their freedom with a signature, but evidently very few would sign a renunciation of their faith. The book *Persecution and Resistance of Jehovah’s Witnesses During the Nazi-Regime 1933-1945* (Hans Hesse [ed.]) furnishes much relevant detail about the subject. This article takes a closer look at Richard Singelenberg’s review of the Hesse anthology, focusing on issues he raises in particular, e. g. the position of JW toward the Jews. Only in recent decades has the notion been promoted – mostly by the former East German State Security (Ministerium für Staatssicherheit, MfS, “Stasi”) and religious polemicists focusing on a June 25, 1933, document known as the Berlin-Wilmersdorf assembly resolution – that older Watchtower publications supposedly contain “anti-Semitic” and “anti-Jewish” statements. Two articles in the Hesse book, written by Gabriele Yonan and Johannes S. Wrobel, refute that criticism.

When isolated comments about Jews are taken from JW publications, the result is an interpretation that distorts the intent of the excerpt or ignores its context. Eyewitness reports testify to the consideration JW showed toward Jews in distress and to their readiness to help them. Gestapo and Nazi courts, however, accused JW of non-conformity in the *Rassenfrage* (“race issue”). The benevolent behavior of JW toward the Jews during 1933 to 1945 is not overshadowed by supposedly “anti-Jewish” remarks in their religious writings after 1932 – such statements must be contextualized by a careful examination of JW publications, especially German editions, whereby historical conditions and biblical intention are taken into account. The JW’ biblically based conviction of the equality of all “races” before God protected these peaceable citizens from supporting any anti-Semitism or anti-Judaism. The application of definitions from the anti-Semitic discourse of modernism can only lead to an anachronistic misinterpretation of the significance of the quotations in question. Since the historical facts speak for the integrity of the persecuted JW, governmental, academic, and other non-religious institutions meet their stand during the Nazi era with respect and recognition.