

The Myth of the State

OR THE STATE'S RELIGIOUS LEGITIMATION

By CARL-MARTIN EDSMAN

When the exiled philosopher E. Cassirer passed away in April 1945, the manuscript later published as *The Myth of the State* was found on his desk in America. Since he himself was a victim of the race myth used politically under the Third Reich, he had found how important philosophical vigilance was against the malevolent myth in its different guises. Like the chaos monster Tiamat, it had to be subdued continually by "the intellectual, ethical and esthetic powers."

The ideologist of National Socialism, A. Rosenberg, used the term myth for the belief or conception of life which was to sustain the new state. The Third Reich's myth was the superiority and glory of the Aryan¹ race. In addition, Hitler compared the requisite official ideology or philosophy to a religion. It must be intolerant like a religion; it demanded total submission, organization and devotion to struggle.²

Even Hitler's comrade in arms, Mussolini, used similar language, although the substance was partially different. Thus in a speech at Naples in 1922, Mussolini said: "We have created our myth. The myth is a faith, it is passion. It is not necessary that it shall be a reality. It is a reality by the fact that it is a goad, a hope, a faith, that it is courage. Our myth is the nation, our myth is the greatness of the nation!"³

Both the racial myth and the national myth have survived the defeat of fascism and National Socialism in the Second World War, although in other and new forms, especially within the Third World. Even the victorious

¹ Rosenberg, pp. 521 f., 692. Cf. Heisig, pp. 7 ff., 15 ff., and H. Weinrich in Fuhrmann, pp. 353 f.

² Sabine, p. 758, quoting *Mein Kampf*, English translation 1935, pp. 512 ff.

³ Quoted in Sabine, *ibid.*

powers, who were divided into opposing camps, the First and Second World, shortly afterwards, have their myths. One of the poets of the Russian Revolution, Mayakovsky, expresses the demand for a myth, e.g., in his poem of revolution, "150,000,000" from 1919-20: "In wild annihilation / sweeping away the old / we will thunder out to the world / a new myth."¹ It is not Dionysus or Prometheus who is the spokesman for the Russian atheist poet in his early poems and plays of revolution—it is Christ! The mythical archetype which links the traditional Christian myth to the revolutionary is portrayed in the following way in these words:

The world we live in is diseased with imperfection and iniquity, and with undeserved suffering. All this must go under in fire and water in order for a new world to be created, for the golden age or the lost paradise to return. But this redemption of existence inevitably requires an expiatory sacrifice. As preacher of the revolution, the poet himself becomes both prophet and apostle, martyr and sacrifice, identifying himself with Christ in this last role. Here Mayakovsky can appear to come into conflict with Marxist theory. Marx had firmly rejected any mythification of the revolution, although his own writings have not remained unchallenged in this regard. One of his challengers is Sorel, who, besides emphasizing the importance of the social myth, contended that Marx personally employed the language of prophecy and of myth.²

The state governed by law, which Cassirer contrasts to the totalitarian state with a mythical legitimation, nevertheless has its own myth claiming to be true and good, and to fulfill a positive function. Not only myth and reason, violence and law, come into conflict with each other, but even different kinds of myths are engaged in struggle. Also writing against the background of the agonies of World War II, H. Berkhof, Dutch Reformed Church historian, has discussed the theocratic consciousness, which binds the authorities to God's word and leads to a prophetic-critical denunciation of that government whose actions violate a divinely sanctioned right. The

¹ After Striedter's German translation based on the Russian original in Mayakovsky's *Collected Works*, Moscow edition 1955-61, II, p. 125 = vv. 355 ff. The poem consists of 1708 lines, and the quoted segment is lacking in the Swedish translation of U. Bergström-G. Harding, pp. 13 ff.

² Striedter in Fuhrmann, pp. 409 ff., 412, 416, 430 f.

pre-Christian Roman cult of Caesar was static and conservative, while the Church, despite its periodical fusion with the state power, deprives it of its divine dignity.¹ Or as another, perhaps better known, church historian formulated it at the turn of the century: "From the practical point of view, what was of still greater moment than the campaign against the world and worship of the gods, was *the campaign against the apotheosis of men. Christianity tore up political religion by the roots.*"²

Despite the close connection in German and Nordic Lutheranism between church and state and the loyalty to the authority appointed by God (Rom. 13), the Christian critique of the state (Rev. 13) has also had an impact.³ Christian political criticism can even lead to supporting revolution as "a necessary corrective to obsolescent forms of law and order."⁴ The conflict between the Christian "myth" and other myths may also lead to the demand for secularization from both sides.⁵ This does not prevent the Christian, however, from wanting to view the state in relation to the commandment to love one's neighbor.

In the Third World, besides native traditions, there are ideas taken from the Christian or secularized West. The first type of appropriation may have taken place long ago or in our own time. Within Islam, an offshoot from Judaism and Christianity, the theocratic consciousness is highly evident. The holder of political power is the instrument of God and shall therefore be obeyed. The ruler, on the other hand, shall consult his subjects, and the believers shall do the same among themselves and assist each other in word and deed. Authority (*hukm*) and consultation (*shūrā*) are the god-given foundations for the society. Islam is in theory an egalitarian lay theocracy.⁶

The ancient advanced cultures of South and East Asia and their religions

¹ Cf. also Barker, Dvornik, Ivanka, pp. 22 ff., 46 ff., 60 ff., and Goerdts.

² A. von Harnack, *New Testament Studies*, 1-4, New York 1907-1911, 1, p. 295, quoted in Sibley, p. 156.

³ Cf. from a historical point of view, Normann, Kjöllnerström, Dombois-Wilkens, Göransson, Kisch, Honecker, Duchrow; for decisions of Scandinavian church authorities during the Second World War, Borchsenius, pp. 128 ff., Lehtonen, pp. 50 ff.

⁴ P. Verghese in Anne-Marie & L. Thunberg, p. 180. Cf. the Proceedings from the World Council of Churches at Uppsala 1968.

⁵ Cf. Anne-Marie Thunberg, pp. 78 ff.

⁶ Gardet, pp. 235, 376 f., with references.

contain rich, truly mythic substance for the ideology of the state. According to the Rigveda X.90, the four castes sprang into being from sacrificially disjointed members of Purusha, the primeval man.¹ Even in pre-Christian Scandinavia, which belongs to a larger Indo-european cultural tradition, the various estates are attributed to a divine ancestral father, who begets the serf, the free peasant and the jarl with different mothers.² In this way a given, static social order receives confirmation and legitimation. On the other hand other myths legitimate dynamic change. The time of redemption, the new age is to follow the era of evil and injustice. But this new age, in these ancient philosophies of history, consists of the return of the mythical primeval paradise. The course of the world begins anew in an ever continuing cycle, in which world history merely has a relative beginning and a relative end. History does seem to repeat itself even in a shorter perspective and consequently becomes typological, exemplary or mythic in substance.

The Afroasian movements for national liberation are almost obsessed with the past of their peoples, whether their history is considered nightmarish and thus to be banished, or illustrious, to be resurrected. The Tunisian Jew, Albert Memmi, and Frantz Fanon have especially stressed this fact, mainly concerning North Africa. There are according to Gordon three possible perspectives towards the present: those of the futurist, the apologist and the reconstructionalist.³

The Third World is only repeating what was achieved in the West, particularly during the 19th century by Thierry, Guizot, Bancroft and Treitschke, as, for instance, Shafer has pointed out. Jeanne d'Arc, who layd claim to divine inspiration, has primarily become a French nationalist, and the Teutonic Cherusker chief Arminius, who defeated the Romans in the year 9, has become "Germany's liberator". The Spanish kings have been traced to a son of Noah (Tubal), and the English have received their legitimation by being linked with the Trojans.⁴ A recent work justly speaks of "the use and misuse of historical heroes and incidents as symbols, and of unifying myths to combat the colonizer's historiographical pretensions and the myths

¹ Cf. Spellman, pp. 10 ff.

² The Edda poem *Rígsþula*, see Ström, p. 136.

³ Gordon, pp. 29-52.

⁴ Gordon, p. 55. Cf. Sibley, pp. 554 ff.

of rivals, as well as to 'reanimate' a people to a sense of its historical value." The author lays the blame for "the manufacture of the sometimes extravagant myths" on the conquerors and colonizers. It is understandable that their overbearing myths "have evoked equally ethnocentric and proud myths from the conquered and colonized." Quite like Cassirer, Gordon hopes that "the surgery of critical and scientific history", which serves the universality of man, shall be able to remove the malignant outgrowths of national mythology.¹

Philosophers of history and social scientists characterize secular, political ideologies as social religions,² which to a great extent employ secularized religious concepts, objectives, and manifestations: "All significant concepts of modern political science are *säkularisierte theologische Begriffe*."³ Or, in the more detailed formulation of another scholar: "Ours has been the age par excellence of political faiths, of secular salvations offered on a national or universal scale. Intricate new mythologies and rituals have been constructed by these disenchanting believers, and millions more lives have been offered on the altars of these new devotions than were offered in the persecution of Christians in the Roman Empire. Parties have laid claim to men's ultimate devotion. They have elicited a self-sacrificing enthusiasm for an idea or for a corporate reality superior to the mean individual. Men have turned to blind believing in an effort to overcome the emptiness of their lives."⁴

This last quotation originates from a church historian in California who has examined the rites and symbols of political religions. His view is that the ideologies with mythical elements, or Nazism, Communism, Fascism and Democracy, provide the main alternatives to nineteenth-century Christianity. It should be observed that also Democracy as a political value system is subjected to analysis in this and similar contexts. This practice follows from a common experience. When the individual in the world of today is treated unjustly or feels threatened by his own government, he asks himself: what kind of ideas or myths (a word used in many senses) really control the way things develop? The theoretician may go a step further and say: this is

¹ Gordon, pp. 128 ff.

² Cf. the author's "Histoire et religion".

³ Kafka, p. 475.

⁴ Koenker, p. vii.

an important, far-reaching task for an entire research team. A more concise and succinct reply is heard from both angry young men and the average person, the first in all seriousness and the second more half-heartedly: The system's rotten! This gives only a hint of the existential character of the theme of this symposium, which, by the way, has been the subject of other multidisciplinary projects and gatherings of this kind. In the following I shall name only two of them, for they shed better light on two significant questions which have already been touched upon—those of history of ideas and of terminology. The spiritual kinship which does exist between myths supporting antagonistic political systems may be due to their common ancestry in the history of ideas.

In the early 1950s, the five-year project RADIR (Revolution And the Development of International Relations) was launched by the Carnegie Corporation and the Hoover Institution at Stanford. RADIR's purpose was to gain new understanding of contemporary history by a study of the changes in the ruling elite's composition and by content analysis of their vocabulary. The relatively stable Western elites from 1890-1950 were here contrasted with their revolutionary counterparts in both Europe and Asia.

The introductory paper on comparative study of symbols is written by Lasswell and Pool. According to these scholars, Plato's treatment of myth in his dialogue on the state is basic to all discussion of political symbols in Western political and social theory. Another precursor is the Arab historian and philosopher Ibn Khaldūn, although his influence reached the West relatively recently. Plato's guardians, as well as the common people, were to embrace the myth, but their relationship to it remains freer, the myth serving as a fiction, not a lie.

Ibn Khaldūn subsequently analyzed the interplay between power, solidarity and faith: "Vast and powerful Empires are founded on religion ... A Religion reinforces the power which a state has already acquired from its solidarity and numbers ... religious fervour can efface the competitiveness and envy felt by the members of the group toward each other, and turn their faces towards the truth." No religious movement can be successful unless it is based on solidarity. After a kingdom is established, however, neither solidarity nor armed force is required, since the power of the ruler is accepted as the will of God.

Modern political theory has not progressed much further than Plato and Ibn Khaldūn concerning these three basic elements in the theory of the state. Gaetano Mosca accordingly illustrates the religious legitimation of the state with the Christian ruler by the grace of God, the caliph as representative of Mohammed and the heavenly mandate of the Chinese emperor.

The Frenchmen of the Enlightenment undermined the religious myths, while Marx extended the critique to the secular, political myth. Later Sorel interpreted the elite's language in mythical categories. In examining political change it is fruitful to study the transformation of mythic language. The following questions arise: "Under what circumstances is one myth rejected and another accepted? Under what circumstances is an established myth successfully transmitted?" Military defeat and discontent invalidate myths, quick triumphs endorse new myths. Universal myths pass from the strong and well-fed to the weak and unsatisfied.

The political myth contains *doctrine*, *formula*, and *miranda*, i.e., prevailing political philosophy, statutes and ordinances, and folklore. "A political myth is a recurring set of statements and key symbols appearing in the 'content' of communication. The myth is 'frozen meaning', a metaphor which is acceptable in the sense that it emphasizes the stability of the pattern."¹

Both Plato and Ibn Khaldūn have been interpreted and applied in various ways. The latter may be read in a neo-marxist manner, the underlying struggle for power distinguished from the ideological superstructure. This perspective, based in historical materialism, is essentially shared by sociology in general. In opposition to this viewpoint, Koenker, like Plato and Ibn Khaldūn, makes a metaphysical assertion. In the last resort, he claims, study of the political mythologies must be theological (although in a sense foreign to Scandinavian word usage), since social anthropology looks at all these systems solely from a functional and psychological viewpoint. Social anthropology relativizes, becomes incapable of correctly understanding the religion and at a loss to appraise it critically.² One might add that it is indifferent to whether the myth is a lie and the ideology a tactic or swindle.

There are also metaphysical elements in those who seem to stick to hard

¹ Pool, p. 11. Cf. for Plato, Sibley, pp. 60 ff.

² Koenker, pp. 6 ff. Cf. Schmitt, pp. 309 ff.

human reality. Sorel, whom I've already mentioned several times, has brought this tendency to light in his criticism of Marx. As for himself, Sorel expresses irrational and anti-intellectual opinions of both nature and society in his *Réflexions sur la violence* from 1905. There blind will prevails, not reason. He unites the Hegelian heritage in Marxism, insofar as it is dependent upon a mystical evolutionism, with similar metaphysics in E. von Hartmann, who in turn had combined Hegel with Schopenhauer. Sorel asserts, with some justification, that capitalism in Marx behaves like the Unconscious in Hartmann, since it acts as a blind and cunning force, which gives rise to higher forms of society without so intending. At the same time Sorel is indebted to Bergson and his romantic emphasis upon the creative role of intuition. This is the myth in Sorel's syndicalism. According to him, a myth is essential to all broad social movements, as, for example, to Christianity. Although beyond analysis, it provides the volitional and emotional energy to act and gives cohesion to the group. To the proletariat Sorel offers the myth of the general strike, which, however, does not have the same appeal as the myth of the classless society or of national grandeur. The latter has been the myth of Mussolini and Fascism, which has also been under Sorel's influence. In effect, the philosophy of Fascism joins the nationalist tradition in Hegel with Nietzsche's and Sorel's will to power. The strong elite which possesses intuitive insight has the right to revolution and violence.¹

The slightly contemptuous or critical overtones present when the word ideology is pronounced, as contrasted with the respect long attached to 'idea', is not of recent vintage, either. During the period of the French Revolution, Destutt de Tracy coined the concept ideology to describe a "science of ideas", which was to be a basic humanistic discipline. Napoleon considered this attitude overly theoretical, since, in his estimation, it failed to deal with the reality of society and politics. The negative colouring which the word ideology has gained since then comes from the label ideologist which Napoleon applied to philosophers who opposed his imperial ambitions. Marx also belongs to this tradition when he characterizes ideology as every theory which attempts to explain, or rather to explain away, reality

¹ Sabine, pp. 717 f., 758 Cf. Gregor, pp. 113 ff.; Sibley, pp. 546 ff.

instead of transforming it. Law, politics, religion, bourgeois science are all ideologies, which are to protect and justify the economic interests of the ruling class. Consequently they are not true; they are part of the superstructure, but nonetheless dangerous. An impression of self-interest and irrationality has thus come to surround the word ideology, both in politics and sociology. This interpretation may also apply to Lasswell-Kaplan's definition of 1950: "The ideology is the political *myth* functioning to preserve the social structure." Gregor makes a contradistinction between such a "charter myth" and an "organizational or functional myth" which is used to support the revolutionary challenge of the dominant elite. Advocates of both myths naturally claim to have a corner on the truth.¹

Contemporary ideologies contain the ambiguity inherent in the word which stems from views of the past, not only in terms of terminology and subject matter but also concerning pretensions and effects. In a recently published, comprehensive work on the power struggle of world politics, the lawyer Wilhelm Grewe analyzes both theory and practice in international relations. Dealing with rational as well as irrational motives for political actions, he also touches upon the question of ideology and power politics. Have world politics lost their ideological character or not? The answer is of considerable importance for peaceful coexistence between East and West. Coexistence is obviously complicated if the systems of power striving to become universal are sustained by the consciousness of a calling, based on antagonistic ideologies.

In this respect our own century displays more resemblances to the 16th and 17th centuries than to the intervening ones. The various absolutist claims of the religious war period were supplanted by the power politics of national states. The latter could, in effect, be given a more general justification without therefore aspiring to universal dimensions. In contrast, during the 20th century, Bolshevism, Fascism and National Socialism have proved to be ideological forces which have extended over national borders and have led to new groupings and collisions.

With its belief in the "superstructure", Marxism has taught us to look for the function of ideologies both for the ruling class and the exploited and

¹ Koenker, pp. 131 ff.; Gregor, p. 46.

to apply the concept ideology to the different phases of Marxism itself. Defined according to the political scientist Löwenstein, ideologies are thus functions of a life situation which conceal an underlying objective condition or protect a particular interest portrayed as a universal necessity. The negative associations thus attached to the word ideology are less apparent when Löwenstein also defines a political system as an organized society which lives under protection of a concrete political, socio-economic, ethical or religious ideology. This dominant ideology is concretized by special organizations which seek to carry it into effect. Even modern democracies have institutions with ideological backgrounds. Referendums, general elections and representative organs are based on the ideas of the sovereignty of the people and the social contract. When these ideas lose their force, Democracy is still spoken of ideologically, as a system of free competition for political power, for example. Parliamentarism is founded on the bourgeois liberal thesis of the importance of public discussion. When this is no longer relevant, it is instead emphasized that parliamentarism is a necessary technique for balancing different interests in a pluralistic society.

Ideological justification for political institutions becomes particularly important for regimes founded on the monopoly of power by a small elite which lacks religious, traditional or charismatic legitimation.¹

Thus we find that Grewe sometimes uses ideology in a negative sense, and then in contrast to religion, for instance, while in other places he has a more positive view of the word, whereby religion itself becomes a kind of ideology. It is evident from samples of writings in political science that both myth and ideology are consistently used in a very broad sense, with a wide range of meanings. Their vocabulary is imprecise; words are transferred from one area to another. Ideologies are called religions and religions ideologies. Similar inversions also characterize what happens in practice. The preacher plays the politician and the politician pleads like a preacher.²

This lack of terminological clarity leads of necessity to a discussion of what myth really is. A preliminary definition of myth as a political ideology is that myth is a symbolic expression which objectifies social emotions. Myth

¹ Grewe, pp. 210 ff.

² Koenker, pp. 11 ff.

has a logic of its own and is impervious to analysis by reason or argument. Even Plato used the myth in his critical dialogues, although he significantly abandons it when he examines political life. Following these reflections, Koenker presents this attempt at classification:

- A. The ontological myth.
- B. The spontaneous myth, i.e. legends about folk heroes.
- C. The myth of cultural integration, which is a complement to or a substitute for the religious myth, which in turn has often been linked with the political myth.
- D. Ideology as a point of view.
- E. Limited ideologies.
- F. Ideologies embracing a total view of man and society.¹

This outline has the advantage of clearly distinguishing between myth and ideology and of differentiating within each of these groups. The ontological myth most nearly corresponds to word usage in religion itself and the scientific study of religion, where myth is seen as an attempt to express a truth and reality.² That it may be necessary, however, to take a more imprecise use of the word into consideration should be evident from the preceding as well as from a symposium on myth held some years ago.

With support from the Volkswagenwerk Foundation, a colloquium with myth as theme was organized in September 1968. It convened at a center for interdisciplinary research attached to the university in Bielefeld/Westfalen. The participants were primarily literary scholars, but philosophers, theologians, historians and art historians also took part. In print the result was a comprehensive volume of 732 pages, containing eighteen papers and nine discussions of the subject.³ The principle issue taken up is what function and reality the mythical has in a time which is no longer mythical. Myth is often presented as antagonistic to theological dogma, philosophic theory, allegory and ideology, but the post-mythical myth primarily has a number of positive characteristics. These include not only the variable plot of the

¹ Koenker, pp. 137 ff. Cf. now Tudor, who appeared after the completion of this paper.

² Pettazzoni, p. 15; the author's *Myt, saga, legend*, pp. 12 ff., with references. Cf. Kirk.

³ See Fuhrmann.

narrative or the pattern of time with everything's eternal return. Even the explosive force inherent in the myth which can be released in different ways is comprehended. As a final characteristic, myth incorporates the "large dimension" which the individual is unable to master and therefore experiences either as terror and coercion or as play and freedom.

The contributors have been responsive to the elusive reality of history and do not base their views on a preconceived theory of myth, whether philosophical, psychological, structuralistic or social scientific in nature. Their examples, drawn from Homer to Joyce and Mayakovsky, deal with such diverse phenomena as gnosticism, the spiritual drama of the Middle Ages and idealistic philosophy. These examples shed light not only on the epoch in question but also on our own time, in which we have experienced the annihilating power to myth to elevate men above themselves. The subject area *Nachleben der Antike* is also well covered with Christian reinterpretation of the ancient myth through typological understanding of the stories of Classical Antiquity, use of personification and allegory, etc. Romanticism is represented, for instance, by a paper on Schiller and the myth of Hercules. The mythology of glory is dealt with from 1500 to 1900, as is the relation of Christian doctrine and myth.

This account of the book's contents principally gives a hint of the possibilities literary scholarship has to contribute to the discussion of myth. Moreover, a number of other concepts and phenomena other than those in the realm of political ideology which are closely related to myth are brought to our attention. As historians of religion, however, we may be most interested in the connection between the religious myth and political ideology or myth. And now, to leave this discussion of a rather confused terminology I will take some concrete examples from an area which should be less well-known in this respect, although it is in the focus of the world's political and humanitarian interest, namely, Southeast Asia.

Several modern scholarly attempts have been made to understand Indonesian nationalism by referring either to events and impulses from outside of Indonesia or to pre-colonial nationalism. In a recent work on Sukarno, B. Dahm, who is indebted especially to Sarkisyanz and W. F. Wertheim, has pointed out a scarcely noticed element in Indonesia's nationalism, the Javanese myth. Although Wertheim had observed its tendencies toward

hostility to foreigners, he called the occupation with this theme a flight into the past. Only one contributor to a collection on new trends within Islam, published in 1932 by the Arabist H. A. R. Gibb, emphasized the political significance of the myth on Java. The belief in Ratu-Adil, the promised righteous ruler, and his prophet Jayabaya, for instance, has inspired the Indonesian freedom movement. The native history writers have, however, clearly recognized the role which this myth has played, although they have not been able to explain how this belief once arose. According to Dahm, a fusion of apocalyptic expectations from Hinduism, Buddhism and Islam is actually involved. The different cultural and religious influences to which Java has successively been subjected have thus brought, in chronological order, the hinduist teaching of the four ages of the world, the buddhist announcement of the coming savior of the world, Maitreya, with his fable-tree of gifts and the mahdī expectations of Islam.¹

Bloody intermezzos during one of the last stages of the colonial period were blamed on religious fanaticism which Westerners found incomprehensible at the time, but in fact they were created by the ancient myth of Ratu-Adil, as we have since learned. The myth was ineffective in the form which inspired four attempts to found the new kingdom as late as 1924. When the Dutch tried to remove the freedom fighter Bapak Kayah from a procession in which he was participating, his followers, armed only with knives and bamboo spears, attacked the Western soldiers and policemen. In their view Bapak Kayah was on his way to proclaim the New Kingdom. His royal father's spirit had repeatedly called to him from the volcano Gunung Gedeh. The freedom leader was going to consult this superhuman advisor there concerning the establishment of the Kingdom and would then seek confirmation of his sovereignty from the colonial government. If he did not receive it, the holy war must begin. He had therefore provided himself and his followers with amulets in the form of medallions (djimets), and he and his retinue had fasted in order to become invulnerable. In his quality as leader of shadow plays, also a magico-religious position, Bapak Kayah had had no difficulties in recruiting supporters. This attempt to overthrow the

¹ Dahm, pp. xiv ff. Cf. for the following even van der Kroef, pp. 81 ff., and Bräker I: 2, pp. 202 ff.

ruling order by means of an old mythology, even though it was experienced existentially, and with primitive weapons, was naturally doomed to failure.

An old local prophecy was given new, though temporary, vitality during the Second World War when it was employed in the war propaganda of the victorious Japanese. This apocalyptic myth had been discovered long before by another foreign conqueror. When Sir Stamford Raffles occupied Java in 1816 at the head of a British expeditionary corps, after the Dutch had been forced to ally themselves with Napoleon, he found in the sultanate's library a prophecy ascribed to the 13th century ruler Jayabaya of the Kingdom of Kediri in East Java.

This prophecy said that in the middle of the twentieth century Europeans would establish their domination over the island but would be defeated by a foreign prince, who in turn would leave Java and entrust power to its own government. In 1942 the Japanese were able to exploit this myth cleverly and successfully in the leaflets which prepared the people for their arrival. To the surprise of the people, the current event was thus clearly confirmed in mythical language with which they were very familiar. In this way the new conqueror was presented as a liberator, who would establish the new Indonesia.

The man who could claim with greater justice to fulfill the old mythical expectations was Sukarno, ruler of the independent island kingdom. Since, however, events in this area of Southeast Asia appear highly complicated, we will turn our attention to another country in this part of the world. There also a new explosive element has been added to the mythical-political powder kay—Western Marxism, but with a very local reinterpretation. With few exceptions the political leadership in Burma has rejected pure Marxism. On the other hand, the social program of Marxism has been retained, which the leaders, from national pathos, have rediscovered in their own religious tradition. This has led to the attempt by Burma's political leaders to establish the modern welfare state on the following Buddhist socio-political theories:

- 1) The folklore belief in millenarianism or the restoration of the illustrious ancient order.
- 2) The coming of the Buddhist universal ruler and creation of the earthly Nirvana.
- 3) The heritage of the Ashokan tradition.

One of the sources of inspiration for economic policy was Fabian moderate socialism, which was propagated by John Furnivall, a retired English colonial official in Burma. Both U Nu and another Burmese socialist were influenced by the Fabian Society's ideas about the welfare state, concurrent to their being disciples of the author Thakin Kudaw Hmain. Steeped in Burma's national traditions, the latter, when ten years old, had tearfully witnessed the removal of the country's last king into imprisonment by the British in 1885. He was well acquainted with the ideal Buddhist structure of society as portrayed, for example, in *Dīgha Nikāya* (3.80 ff.; 3.58 ff.). In his book *Thakin Tīkā* from 1938, this author wrote about the prehistoric paradise, the earthly Nirvana, when the fabled Padeytha tree supplied all human needs. But avarice led some men to hoard, fighting broke out, and it became necessary to pass laws and to elect a coming Buddha as ruler, who was entitled to collect a tithe.

Kudaw Hmain thus derives both the democratic principles of the English and the socialist ideal of fighters for independence from Burma's Buddhist cultural heritage. The people is its own master and the government its servant, one of whose duties is to support the monastic order. The nativism of the peasant rebellion of 1930-31, which was oriented wholly to the past, is thus replaced by a more effective intellectual adaptation, so that the ideology of freedom becomes revolutionary, democratic and socialist. This is Buddhist socialism or the "Burmese Way to Socialism".

When General Ne Win seized power in 1962, the decree of the previous year which had made Buddhism the state religion in Burma was rescinded. However, this event did not prevent traditional elements from remaining prominent, but even accentuated them, according to van der Kroef. This new national philosophy essentially repudiates Marxism, while also criticizing Capitalism. In contrast to U Nu, Ne Win rejects the Western parliamentary system, which his predecessor had sought to join to a modernized Buddhist ethic. The new head of state considers it incompatible with the Burmese way to Socialism. Instead, the attempt is made to justify the socialist "laws" of contribution (according to capacity) and of distribution (according to work) by means of aspects of Buddhist eschatology, like the "law of permanence" and the "law of change". Moreover, the military

dictator assumes the authority which Buddhism of old has conferred upon the charismatic king.¹

Time and space do not permit studying similar phenomena in the relation between Islam and Socialism,² or between the Chinese cultural heritage and Maoism.³ The Afroasian world everywhere provides us with examples of traditional myths acting as a living force in the construction of the new society, though inspired to a large degree by apparently secular, Western ideologies. It has been possible to combine or to identify these with national patterns of thought and action formed by religion, since political systems in both West and East are influenced by myth, the first indirectly, the second directly.

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¹ Sarkisyanz 1955, pp. 351 ff.; Sarkisyanz 1965, pp. 149 ff.; Schechter, pp. 108 ff.; van der Kroef, pp. 79 ff. — The sacral kingship is not being discussed at this symposium, since an entire congress of the history of religion in 1955 was devoted to this theme; see *The Sacral Kingship*.

² Cf. the author's *Asiens huvudreligioner*, pp. 151 ff.

³ Cf. Kindermann, Bauer, pp. 508 ff., and Schilling.

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