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TOTALITARIANISM AS A RELIGIOUS PHENOMENON

Abstract:

Although the nature of crimes committed in totalitarianism could be attributed to atheism, there are serious indications that totalitarian regimes are modeled on religious dogma. A model for acquiring mass support for ideological path of totalitarian movement has been found in the belief systems and myths of traditional religions. Although it was created with the development of modern democracy, the sacralization of politics became a powerful tool for the development of totalitarian nationalist movements. Some of the myths in the ideological-political sphere, such as that of race supremacy, have become a source of shared beliefs on a national level. Thus, the masses are mobilized to give impetus to the establishment of new systems of values, similar to belief systems, myths, rituals and symbols interpretation as in traditional religion. Through a comparative analysis of the religious context of the most powerful totalitarian regimes in the first half of the twentieth century, the aim of the paper is to outline the importance and role of sacralization of politics in strengthening totalitarianism in the modern world.

Key words: *myth, politics, religion, sacralization, totalitarianism.*

“Ultimately, totalitarianism is the only sort of politics that can truly serve the sky-god’s purpose. Any movement of a liberal nature endangers his authority and that of his delegates on earth. One God, one King, one Pope, one master in the factory, one father-leader in the family at home.”

Gore Vidal²

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INTRODUCTION

With separation of state and church, relationship between political and religious dimensions, that is, relationship of power towards traditional religions, changed. Instead of the ubiquitous sacralization of political power thought history, i.e. the emanation of deity in rulers' images, we have the sacralization of politics – the attribution of holiness to political entities. Appearance of various cultural and political movements, which aspired to take the position of a “global conception of human existence“ and replace traditional religions with a “new religion of humanity“, significantly contributed to the emergence of the sacralization of politics.³ This “process” was reinforced by putting nation into the foreground of political plan, spreading the idea of national sovereignty and developing a sense of loyalty to nation-state. By developing myths about supremacy of race and nation, the sacralization of politics has practically built a background for the emergence of totalitarian regimes.

By publicly advocating the mythical origins of their own nation, or race, nationalist movements after the First World War won wide popular masses over for their political ideas. The conquest of power was facilitated by massive support for parties and leaders who “presented” themselves as the nation’s sole way out and savior. A model of acquiring mass support for ideological path of a totalitarian movement has been found in the belief systems and myths of traditional religions. By politicizing all aspects of social and individual existence, with a dosed use of violence and terror, totalitarian regimes, after taking power, eliminate potential sources of danger for their position. Leaders of totalitarian regimes rise themselves to the level of deity, gods in human form, viewing devotion and loyalty of citizens as the attitude of believers towards God.

After looking at the role of myths in ideological and political sphere, the paper considers the religious character of totalitarian regimes, and through a comparative analysis of the religious context of the most powerful totalitarian regimes in the first half of the 20th century, it has the aim to point out the importance and role of sacralization of politics in strengthening totalitarianism in the modern world. In connection to this, the comparison of socialism in the USSR with fascism in Italy and national socialism in Germany has no ideological connotation, but is solely in the function of proving that any totalitarian regime, regardless of its ideological

³ Gentile Emilio, *Le religioni della politica. Fra democrazie e totalitarismi* [*The religions of politics. Between democracies and totalitarianisms*], Laterza & Figli, 2007, p. 22.

character, is built and maintained by deification of the ruling political entities, and their leaders in particular.

THE ROLE OF MYTH IN THE IDEOLOGICAL-POLITICAL SPHERE (SACRALIZATION OF POLITICS)

“It is difficult to separate, at times, the myth from the truth.”

Robert Cane⁴

In a sea of abstract interests, the human individual has a primeval need to find their place and role in the world around them. The search for identity is a pursuit of cognitioning the features that define us as individuals and make us different from other people. The specificity of human identity is that a person has self-awareness and the ability to self-determine, that is, people have an ability to think and decide who and what they want to be.⁵ In quest to find oneself, a need to identify with different forms of association in human communities arises in a man. This is necessary because involvement in society (belonging to a particular ethnic, religious, cultural, professional, and other type of community) is one of the three dimensions of human identity. Personal identity is also one of those three dimensions - each person is unique, has a unique physical body, a unique mindset and a unique life path. As in the familiar verses:⁶

“I shall be telling this with a sigh

Somewhere ages and ages hence:

Two roads diverged in a wood, and I—

I took the one less traveled by,

And that has made all the difference.”

⁴ An American comic book writer and artist who along Bill Finger created the DC Comics character Batman.

⁵ Parekh Bhikhu, *A New Politics Identity - Political Principles for an Interdependent World*, 1st edition, Macmillan International Higher Education, 2008, p. 14.

⁶ Frost Robert, poem „The Road Not Taken“ in *Mountain Interval*, Henry Holt and Co., New York 1931, EBook #29345 available at: <http://www.gutenberg.org/files/29345/29345-h/29345-h.htm>, p. 9.

The third dimension consists of belonging to a special species,⁷ and awareness of that belonging, as well as a relatively free personal choice to create oneself as a member of that species. It is difficult to separate these three dimensions and to point out only one as the most important because a man is actually their totality, and the absence of only one of them diminishes his life accomplishment. Personal identity is the closest to a constant, while involvement in society seems the closest to a variable. Despite all the changes that come from the outside, the inner core of the personality remains unchangeable, even more persistent in the circumstances of experiencing intense external and internal changes.⁸ Sometimes a thin line separates these two identities, because the most common question of “who I am” is identified with the question “who I belong to”.⁹ In response, identification with a group, usually a nation, is very common.¹⁰ Therefore, beliefs and convictions, which develop over time and solidify in the central nucleus, make a personal identity by which one is identified. Yet, as we shall see later, some convictions (such as political ones) are manifested as a Trojan horse in the central core, disturbing the tenacity of that most solid stone from which personal identity is built.

Approximate beliefs and convictions pool people in political communities where they recognize the path to realization of their life interests, or life circumstances lead them to that path. Since the mid-19th century, when history records the formation of post-Napoleonic European states and countries, nation has imposed itself as the broadest fundamental political community in human life. Although national identity is perceived as the most recognized universal value of modern times, it is difficult to define the very notion of nation, nationality or nationalism.¹¹ In the simplest terms, a nation is a group of people connected by birth, who share language, culture, and most often common historical reminiscences and citizenship. Nationalism develops on the fact of common origin and seeks to homogenize nation within a social community, a nation-state, and in its negative context to

⁷ *ibid.*, p. 15.

⁸ Jerotić Vladeta, *Čovek i njegov identitet [Man and his identity]*, Zadužbina Vladete Jerotića, Beograd, 2011, p. 8.

⁹ Golubović Zagorka, „Kako se građani identifikuju“ [“How citizens identify themselves”], in: Zagorka Golubović, Ivana Spasić i Djordje Pavićević (Eds.) *Politika i svakodnevni život – Srbija 1999-2002 [Politics and Everyday Life - Serbia 1999-2002]*, Institut za društvenu filozofiju i istoriju, Beograd, 2003, p. 161.

¹⁰ Stojnov Dušan, „Identitet: polifren ili monolitan?“ [“Identity: polyphrene or monolithic?”], *Psihologija*, 3-4, Beograd, 1999, p. 142.

¹¹ Anderson Benedict, *Imagined communities – Reflections on the Origin and Spread of Nationalism*, revised edition, Verso, London, 2006, p. 5.

dominate over members of other nations - not necessarily only within boundaries of its own state. It may sound strange, but although the notion of nationalism, as well as the phenomenon itself, are tied to the previous existence of a nation, it is precisely nationalism that makes it difficult to define a nation. Benedict Anderson sees this problem in paradoxes, such as “the objective modernity of nations to the historian’s eye“ and “their subjective antiquity in the eyes of nationalists”, and “the formal universality of nationality as a sociocultural concept” on the one hand, and on the other “the irremediable particularity of its concrete manifestations”. The third paradox is “the political power of nationalisms”, on the one hand, and “their philosophical poverty and even incoherence”¹² on the other. With their picturesqueness, these paradoxes introduce us to the story of the myth in the ideological-political sphere, that is, about the sacralization of politics. A person’s need for social identification, as well as development of his or her beliefs and convictions are a significant factor in the construction of political myths.

As we said at the beginning, people have the capacity to think, which helps them to develop themselves both materially and mentally. As a product of this ability, science has developed, thanks to which man has been improving the comfort of living, while developing spiritually at the same time. Spiritual development is not only aided by science but also by human ability to fantasize. The role of imagination in human development is not insignificant. The imagination is responsible for many scientific discoveries, but also the imagination has created religion and mythology, thanks to the fact that it is the ability to think about something that is not present at that moment, which may not even exist in a material sense.¹³ And, while religion is faced toward an uncertain future, developing hope of overcoming death, mythology is turned to the past for the sake of the present and, in part, the future. Mythologies are imaginary representations of the past, which evolved from myths, giving the man an orientation in moving through the present world towards the future. By creating myths, people reinforce the idea around which they gather in the community. It is impossible for people to gather and initiate joint action if each of them went their own way. Society is built by uniting the spirits of all citizens around the main idea, as a source of shared convictions. The main idea is set as a higher goal, it becomes dogma - a truth that is not doubted and discussed, whereby dogmatic persuasions point them to strive for a common goal with great zeal and sacrifice.¹⁴ Up until the democratic revolutions in America

¹² *ibid.*, p. 7.

¹³ Armstrong Karen, *A Shorth History of Myth*, Canongate Books Ltd., Edinburgh, 2005, p. 5.

¹⁴ de Tocqueville Alexis, *Democracy in America*, Volumes One and Two, trans. Henry Reeve, A Penn State Electronic Classics Series Publication, The Pennsylvania State University, 2002,

and France at the end of the 18th century, religion was the only source of principles and values valid to a state.¹⁵ Religion is essentially a psychological category, which encompasses religious consciousness, religious sentiment and religious will. Unlike religious consciousness, which is a rational component, religious feeling is a psychic experience of admiration, dependence, love and veneration towards God, and the influence of religion on human life is realized through religious will. With the weakening of the Christianity's hegemony and the church as the foundation upon which the state arose, this model of influence on human lives was taken over by politics, attributing "the qualities of holiness to some worldly entity, such as nation, state, race, party, leader".¹⁶ The emergence of political religions did not mean the disappearance of the traditional religion from the political scene, as the French Enlightenment had predicted, which is evident in the reality we are witnessing. On the contrary, they are still inseparable, as de Tocqueville hinted almost two centuries ago: "Every religion is to be found in juxtaposition to a political opinion which is connected with it by affinity".¹⁷

When historical events shake the ideology that holds the community together, the mythical representations reflect collective anxiety for the endangered existency of the community.¹⁸ The multiplicity of wars and political revolutions, the birth of new nations, and the "emancipation of the population" around the world have made the 20th century an extremely convenient period for the sacralization of politics.¹⁹ Although it evolved with the development of modern democracy, because of the human nature that aspires to idealize identity by emulating an idealized figure, or by adopting moral values of ideology²⁰, the sacralization of politics has become a powerful tool for development of totalitarian nationalist movements. Some of the myths in the ideological-political sphere, such as that of race supremacy, have become a source of shared beliefs on a national level, and beyond, leading to the most monstrous mass atrocities in human history.

p. 493-494, available at: <http://seas3.elte.hu/coursematerial/LojkoMiklos/Alexis-de-Tocqueville-Democracy-in-America.pdf>.

¹⁵ Gentile Emilio, 2007, *op. cit.*, p. 7.

¹⁶ *Ibid.*

¹⁷ de Tocqueville Alexis, *op. cit.*, p. 330.

¹⁸ Despotović Ljubiša, *Politički mitovi i ideologije [Political myths and ideologies]*, Kairos, Sremski Karlovci, 2010, p. 8.

¹⁹ Gentile Emilio, 2007, *op. cit.*, p. 22.

²⁰ Oksenberg Rorty Amelie and Wong David, "Aspects of Identity and Agency", in Owen Flanagan and Amelie Oksenberg Rorty (Eds.), *Identity, Character, and Morality - Essays in Moral Psychology*, A Bradford Book, Cambridge, Massachusetts, London, England, p. 25.

TOTALITARIANISM: DEFINITION, CHARACTER AND COMPARISON

“The ultimate end of any ideology is totalitarianism.”

Thomas Eugene Robbins²¹

At first glance, it could be said that totalitarianism is not difficult to define, since this expression in itself indicates a state of absolutism. Yet, there is no sign of equality between absolutism and totalitarianism. The key difference lies in the relation toward the role of the masses in politics. Absolutism tends to exclude the masses from politics in order for the ruling regime to achieve monopoly of political power. In contrast, totalitarianism achieves total power with complete politicization of all segments of social and individual life. When talking about absolutism, we must also distinguish absolute power from absolute government. Absolute power means unlimited power of a government without the influence of an external body, while absolute government refers to political forms, mostly in the 17th and the 18th century, with monarchy as the most prominent form.²²

In the early 19th century, Alexis de Tocqueville first signaled the emergence of a new form of despotism, characterized by absolute power, all-encompassing to the smallest things,²³ and in its worst form, power would be concentrated in the hands of one person or one body, which would not answer to anyone.²⁴ One hundred years later, the first totalitarian regimes emerged, and the first use of this term was recorded in protests by anti-fascism opponents in Italy. Benito Mussolini was the first who accepted the term, and was officially the first to use it,²⁵ addressing his supporters at the National Fascist Party Congress on June 22, 1925: *“The Fascist conception of the State is all-embracing; outside of it no human or spiritual values can exist, much less have value. Thus understood, Fascism, is totalitarian, and the Fascist State - a synthesis and a unit inclusive of all values - interprets, develops, and potentates the whole life of a people... A party governing a nation ‘totalitarianly’ is a new departure in history. There are no points of reference*

²¹ Thomas Eugene Robbins is an American novelist.

²² Heywood Andrew, *Political Theory*, Palgrave Macmillan, London, 2004, pp. 164-165.

²³ de Tocqueville Alexis, *op. cit.*, p. 770.

²⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 771.

²⁵ Morgan Philip, *Italian Fascism, 1915-1945*, Palgrave Macmillan, 2004, p. 98.

nor of comparison".²⁶ Since then, there have been numerous disagreements over the universal definition of totalitarianism. Still, most authors agree that totalitarian states and totalitarian authorities rely on violence and terror packaged in legal frameworks in order to exercise total power over society. This is practically impossible without complete politicization of every form of existence, which also implies abolition of civil society, privacy and importance of an individual in general.²⁷ Anyone who does not act in accordance with the policies of totalitarian authority, sometimes even as a passive political subject of society, is considered an ideological opponent and is proclaimed internal enemy. And, with an enemy, one knows how to deal. An internal enemy may also become one who is close to the highest circles of totalitarian rule at some point, so purges and political persecution are also a feature of totalitarianism. Therefore, the basic ideological vision of totalitarianism is to achieve complete control over all segments of a society. Unlike such a style of ruling, the path to the very same position from which total control is achieved does not have to be violent. There have been numerous examples throughout history when the establishment of totalitarian rule was preceded by a conquest of that power by democratic means, which implies the free will of broad masses to support the policies promised to them in the election campaign. An important feature of totalitarianism is that the violence and terror that follow do not ruin the adherents' conviction that that authority's actions are rightful. At the beginning of the 20th century, in the preface to *The Protocols of the Elders of Zion*, it was stated that the mentality of crowd attracted evil, that is, a crowd would always greet "deeds of violence with the admiring remark: it may be mean but it is very clever".²⁸ If we know that total duration of totalitarian regimes is quite long, we can rightly ask ourselves how it is even possible to maintain such fanatical commitment of supporters at all. In seeking an answer to this question, we come to the question of political religion.

Political power was imbued with sacrality well before totalitarian regimes of the 20th century appeared. Throughout history it has been "identifying itself with the deity or considered itself as its immediate emanation".²⁹ History provides us with

²⁶ Musolini Benito and Gentile Giovanni, „The Doctrine of Fascism“, The abridged version of 1935 Fascist Government Official Publications, *Fascist Doctrines and Institutions*, by Benito Mussolini, Ardita Publishers, Rome, pages 7-42, 1932, p. 2 and 7, available at: <https://www.sjsu.edu/faculty/wooda/2B-HUM/Readings/The-Doctrine-of-Fascism.pdf>.

²⁷ Heywood Andrew, *op.cit.*, pp. 34 and 59.

²⁸ Arendt Hannah, *The Origins of Totalitarianism*, Meridian Books – The World Publishing Company, Cleveland, and New York, seventh printing, 1962, p. 307.

²⁹ Gentile Emilio, 2007, *op. cit.*, p. 18.

many examples of politicization of religion, that is, the appropriation of spiritual authority within the framework of one of traditional religions by political authority (caesaropapism), or incorporation of a traditional religion into a political dimension.³⁰ In Christianity, we have the example of Byzantium, where the patriarch was only formally head of the church, while substantive authority over the church was in the hands of the head of the worldly power (the emperor). In the figure of Henry VIII, King of England and Ireland, worldly and religious authority was united, and today it is formally united in the figure of the Queen of England. The founder of Islam, the Prophet Muhammad, conjoined in himself state, military and religious authority. Modern age brought a separation of state and church, and relationship between religion and politics took on a new dimension. Politics rose above religion, but adopted a system of religious beliefs and myths, which give divine qualities to political leaders and political institutions. Thus, political religion was born, which is not the same as the politicization of religion. It is “the sacralization of a political system that is based on an irrevocable monopoly of power, on ideological monism, on the obligatory and unconditional subordination of an individual and the community to its own code of commandments: as a result, political religion is intolerant, coercive, integralistic, and seeks to permeate every aspect of individual and community life”.³¹ By permeating every aspect of life, political religion imposes on an individual a sense of dependence, which develops out of fear of supreme authority. It is a process in which fear in political religion originates from the divine just as in a traditional one.

Developing a sense of dependency and unconditional subjugation to an ideological idea, embodied in supreme authority, are tools of complete state control over an individual and community, and the most extreme form of state control is inherent in totalitarian states.³² In them, collective and individual subordination is also required, as well as integration and homogenization, the creation of a man who is spiritually devoted to the realization of the politics of a totalitarian party, which is built on “the myths and the values of a palingenetic ideology”.³³ Totalitarian ideologies created in the 19th and the 20th century had been built on ideological myths developed from historical half-truths, contrary to the demands of truthfulness and

³⁰ *ibid.*, p. 21.

³¹ *ibid.*, p. 20.

³² Heywood Andrew, *op. cit.*, p. 87.

³³ Gentile Emilio & Mallett Robert, “The Sacralisation of politics: Definitions, interpretations and reflections on the question of secular religion and totalitarianism”, *Totalitarian Movements and Political Religions*, Volume 1, 2000 – Issue 1, p. 19, <https://doi.org/10.1080/14690760008406923>, 17/08/2019.

correct argumentation.³⁴ The emergence of the most extreme totalitarian regimes of the 20th century was preceded by the strengthening of nationalism in the 19th century. Instead of traditional mythical figures, idols were given new names: “nation, state, freedom, authority, republic, monarchy, race, class”, and the altar of sacrifice became a battlefield.³⁵ Nationalism elevated the nation as the supreme sacred entity. The myth of the nation is supported by highlighting national symbolism in various segments of social life. Thus, the mass was mobilized to give impetus to establishment of new systems of values, similar to belief systems, myths, rituals and symbols of interpretation in a traditional religion. The creators of new religions of politics were aware of the power of such a system, about which Napoleon Bonaparte once pointed out - “*Religion is excellent stuff for keeping common people quiet*”. The link between religion and socialism, a mass movement that significantly contributed to the sacralization of politics, was noted by Antonio Gramsci, who wrote that socialism is “a kind of faith that has its mystics and its practitioners because in consciousness it replaced the transcendental Catholic God by faith in man and his the best energies as the only spiritual reality”.³⁶

The idea of a religious understanding of socialism was represented by the leader of one of the three largest totalitarian regimes in the first half of the 20th century³⁷, Benito Mussolini. He saw religion in Fascism as well: “If Fascism were not a creed how could it endow its followers with courage and stoicism only a creed which has soared to the heights of religion...”.³⁸ The path that fascism was taking before it grew into a totalitarian regime is practically a pattern of how it happens in practice. The confidence of the masses is most easily achieved by acting outside the parliament, highlighting the public interest as a goal of party’s action, and thus gaining popularity. Indeed, fascism evolved from a multi-party democracy into a national dictatorship, and grew into a totalitarian regime only in 1938, when the National Fascist Party was finally uplifted to “a party above parties”, which “seized

³⁴ Gavrilović Darko, „Mitovi nacionalizma - začarani krug sukoba“ [“Myths of nationalism - a vicious circle of conflict“] in Darko Gavrilović et al., *Mitovi nacionalizma i demokratija*, [*Myths of nationalism and democracy*], Centar za istoriju, demokratiju i pomirenje i Fakultet za evropske pravno-političke studije, Novi Sad, 2009, p. 8.

³⁵ Gentile Emilio, 2007, *op. cit.*, p. 154.

³⁶ Gentile Emilio, *Il mito dello Stato nuovo: dal radicalismo nazionale al fascismo* [*The myth of the new State: from national radicalism to fascism*], Roma; Bari: Laterza, 1999, p. 116, in Gentile Emilio, 2007, *op. cit.* p. 92.

³⁷ Italian fascism, German national-socialism, as well as Soviet socialism during the reign of Stalin.

³⁸ Gentile Emilio & Mallett Robert, *op. cit.*, p. 15.

the state machine.”³⁹ By glorifying military power and discipline of the Roman Empire the myth of the Italian nation as a supreme sacred entity was reinforced. At the same time, the party leader was raised to the level of a sacred leader, the human surrogate of God, the savior in whom all interests of the nation are articulated.

German national-socialism also glorified the Roman Empire, “the First Reich”⁴⁰ of Charlemagne, but considered the German nation as the elected successor. Consequently, the reign of Hitler and his NSWP from 1933 to 1945 was called “the Third Reich”. The insignia and right-handed greetings, now known as the Nazi salute (Zig Heil! - A living victory!) were taken from the Roman Empire. Therefore, nationalism played an important role in the ideology of the Nazi totalitarian regime, but it was presented to the masses through racist policies in two directions - supremacy of the German “Aryan” race and anti-Semitism⁴¹. How strong the racist attitude of the Nazi authorities in Germany was, was demonstrated by the fact that during the pact with the USSR, the Nazi propaganda refrained from attacking the Communists but did not give up their own racist policies. In both cases the political myth was developed. Anti-Semitism was built on a myth of the Jews’ guilt for all evils of this world, beginning with the Passion of Jesus Christ. On the other hand, the political myth of the German race’s supremacy had multiple underpinnings. One of them dates from the 15th century, when a Nordic myth began to spread among the Germans, according to which the Italians scornfully regarded the Germans as barbarians and cultural primitives, which led to the development of inferiority complex, which subsequently became an impetus for the development of German patriotism and a transformation into a sense of racial superiority.⁴² The second was far more serious and credible. Namely, two years after the end of World War I, which was humiliating for Germany, Adolf Hitler and his later close associate Heinrich Himmler became members of the Tula Society, named after a mythical island thought to be Atlantis. This society nurtured a myth that the Germans were direct descendants of Atlantis, and consequently members of the superior human race that had saved itself from a cataclysmic war and, across India and then the Gobi Desert, finally settled in Tibet. Hitler and

³⁹ Arendt Hannah, *op. cit.*, p. 258.

⁴⁰ “Second Reich” is the name for the so-called German Holy Roman Empire, for 47 years - during Emperors William and William II.

⁴¹ Carević Marko, “The Similarities And Differences Between The Italian Fascism And The German National-Socialism”, *Nauka i društvo* [Science and Society], Issue 9, Belgrade, 2018, p. 44-62

⁴² Powel Philip Wayne, *Tree of Hate: Propaganda and Prejudices Affecting United States Relations with the Hispanic World*, University of New Mexico Press, Albuquerque, 1971, p. 48.

Himmler were so taken with this ideological idea of the so-called the Aryan descent of the Germans, that in 1935 they formed a special expedition, SS Aenerbe, for archaeological survey of Tibet, in order to gather archaeological evidence of the superiority of the German race. The sacred symbol - swastika (hooked cross) was taken from Nordic mythology as a feature of the National Socialist Workers' Party. The principle of the leader (*Führerprinzip*) was established, according to which Adolf Hitler, like Mussolini, was raised to the level of messiah. The greeting "Heil Hitler" contained the biblical word "heil" (salvation), and the greeting itself had the meaning "Hitler is the salvation for Germany and for the world".⁴³

The third powerful totalitarian regime of the first half of the twentieth century is the Soviet Union (USSR), under the rule of Joseph Visarionovich Stalin (from 1930 until his death in 1953). When we talk about these totalitarian regimes as religious phenomena, Stalinism differs significantly from the previous two because its ritual practice lacked transcendental dimensions, and its sacralization did not involve deification of a revered object, although Stalin himself said that Marxism was religion of working class.⁴⁴ The sacralization of Bolshevik politics was announced by Lenin in his speech on January 26, 1924: "We, communists, are people of a special mold. We are cut out of special material".⁴⁵ Like Hitler, in one period of his reign he revived the political myth about the worldwide conspiracy of the Jews and began to persecute them. But, on the other hand, Stalin, who was Georgian, did not develop a myth of some kind of Russian national or racial superiority, nor of expanding beyond the borders of the state. This moved him away from Karl Marx's and Lenin's idea of a world revolution and focused him on the idea of developing socialism in one state. Also, unlike Mussolini and Hitler, Stalin did not impose himself as God in human form. Even in the multitude of public holidays marked by socialist symbols, none were dedicated to the leader, not even his birthday, as was the case in some other socialist states. However, it is undisputed that a cult of personality was developed in his case as well. What brought him closer to religious deification by his supporters was his heroization, which put him in the untouchable category of the revered, which is why he was welcomed by massive standing ovations in public, and his associates used every

⁴³ Schirmmacher Thomas, „National Socialism as Religion“, *MBS Texte 94*, Pro Mundis, 5. Jahrgang 2008, p. 3.

⁴⁴ van Ree Erik, "Stalinist Ritual and Belief System: Reflections on 'Political Religion'", *Politics, Religion & Ideology*, 17:2-3, 2016, pp. 143-161, DOI: 10.1080/21567689.2016.1187600, p. 145 and 155.

⁴⁵ Stalin J.V., *Sochineniia*, vol. 6, OGIZ, Gosudarstvennoe izdatel'stvo politicheskoi literatury 1924, Moscow, 1947, p. 46.

opportunity to publicly express their loyalty to him.⁴⁶ What brings Stalinism closer to a religious model is the internal, closed system of beliefs that cannot be scrutinized - what Stalin set as a pattern of action no one dared to check. For the results that the state achieved for the benefit of its citizens, gratitude was not expressed to the party or the state, but to Stalin. It could not have been any other way, given the millions of victims of his totalitarian rule.

CONCLUSION

The need for people to identify with a particular form of social community, and a propensity to adopt beliefs based on political myths, are suitable ground for developing totalitarianism. The advent of totalitarianism was preceded by absolutist rule, which implies an unlimited right to rule, without an interference of any external body. In order to achieve absolute political power, the interference is not allowed to the masses, either. Totalitarian authority, on the contrary, ostensibly involves the masses in political life, but keeps them away from political decision-making. This is achieved by politicizing all aspects of social and personal existence, by imposing political myths that sacralize political goals, but also the leaders who put them into action. Development of systems of beliefs based on political myth is modeled on religion. There are numerous historical examples of permeation of politics and religion in power, whether it is an appropriation of spiritual authority within the framework of traditional religion or the giving of a political dimension to traditional religion. With the separation of state and church, politics rose by adopting a system of religious beliefs and myths, which sacralize some political entities, such as nation, race, state, party, leader. The process of consolidation of nation-states, started in the second half of the 20th century, significantly contributed to the emergence of totalitarian regimes. Developing a myth of one's own origin on a non-historical basis has proven to be a powerful cohesive idea for developing a special belief system for the masses. In order to strengthen and sustain themselves, totalitarian regimes seek to reduce differences between the spiritual and the worldly in the masses in order to rule the minds. A comparative analysis of the key features of the three most powerful totalitarian regimes of the first half of the 20th century showed us that they were a sort of political religion whose duration was limited by the ability to maintain religious acceptance from the masses. The National Platform puts an equality sign between Italian fascism and German National Socialism, but in many ways, even by the aforementioned

⁴⁶ van Ree Erik, *op. cit.*, p. 148-150.

criterion, they significantly differ from Marxism. Putting fascism and national socialism in the same basket with socialism, albeit Stalinist, is actually part of the Western political propaganda. Nevertheless, it cannot be denied that Stalinism had all the features of totalitarianism and has been considered here within that context. Analyzing the sacred qualities of National Socialism and Stalinism, we have seen that they can be compared from a religious standpoint. What ties them closely together as political religions is neutralization of the individual identity in favor of a collective one, which, by applying modalities from traditional religion, is raised to a level of the worldly, including the messianism of their leaders.

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ТОТАЛИТАРИЗАМ КАО РЕЛИГИЈСКИ ФЕНОМЕН

Апстракт

Иако би се природа злочина почињених у тоталитаризму могла приписати атеизму, постоје озбиљни показатељи да су тоталитарни режими направљени по узору на религиозну догму. Модел за придобијање масовне подршке за идеолошки пут тоталитарног покрета пронађен је у системима веровања и митова традиционалних религија. Иако се рађала са развојем модерне демократије, сакрализација политике је постала снажно оруђе за развој тоталитарних националистичких покрета. Неки од митова у идеолошко-политичкој сфери, попут оног о супремацији расе, постали су извор заједничких уверења на националном нивоу. Тако се мобилишу масе ради давања подстицаја постављању нових система вредности, сличних системима веровања, митова, ритуала и симбола интерпетације као у традиционалној религији. Циљ рада је да се кроз компаративну анализу религијског контекста најмоћнијих тоталитарних режима у првој половини XX века, укаже на значај и улогу сакрализације политике у јачању тоталитаризма у савременом свету.

Кључне речи: мит, политика, религија, сакрализација, тоталитаризам.