

emergence from the font with milk and honey. In the ancient world milk and honey were the food given to new-born babies to encourage them to thrive. In personal as well as in national life the call to return offers a powerful attraction but, very often, the impedimenta of our mistakes, the burden of our years, hold us back. The function of the prophets was to awake in the people of Israel a sense of nostalgia for God. Their call to the people was 'remembrance'; remembrance of the destiny to which they had been called, which inevitably involved the remembrance of how they had failed. Remembrance and repentance go together. As Europe begins to recover its memory and its integrity this is the prophetic message spoken by the Christian Church to a people in search of truth.

- 1 *Briefing*, vol xviii no 22, p. 471.
- 2 *The Universe*, December 10, 1989 p. 2.
- 3 Isaiah Berlin, 'Nationalism: Past Neglect and Present Power', in *Against the Current* (Oxford, 1983) pp. 285—330. See also Alain Finkielkraut, *The Undoing of Thought* (London, 1988) pp. 11—16, 51—86.
- 4 For what goes before see Richard Mayne, *Postwar: The Dawn of Today's Europe* (London, 1983) pp. 285—330.
- 5 *The Universe*, December 10, 1989 p. 2.
- 6 Quoted in G.H. Williams, *The Mind of John Paul II* (New York, 1981) p. 256.
- 7 *ibid.*
- 8 Quoted in Eric O. Hansen, *The Catholic Church in World Politics* (Princeton, 1990) p. 125.
- 9 *Briefing* vol xx, no 11, p. 199.

## Understanding Germany

### Nicholas Boyle

#### *Some illusions*

The feelings of trepidation and resentment aroused in Britain by the imminent unification of East and West Germany, and too accurately voiced in July by Mr Nicholas Ridley, derived as much from the disturbance of illusions about ourselves as from any rational insight into the affairs of our most powerful and important neighbour. 'Don't mention the War' was a good joke because it precisely identified a *British* obsession: since 1945 a mythologized version of the Second World War ('the War') has stood in as the image of a national identity which neither the twilight of Empire nor our ever shabbier political institutions, let

alone our industries or our culture, could provide. Mr Ridley's outburst expressed the fear that soon we should not be able to tell the joke any more. We may even, in the Europe of tomorrow, be forced to face the truth about those forgotten, untried, unpunished, uninvestigated war-crimes: not just a few wicked old collaborators who escaped to Britain rather than Latin America, but the collusion of an entire supposedly civilised ruling-class in the deliberate and systematic burning, machine-gunning, dismembering, and burying alive of hundreds of thousands of women and children in what until a few months ago were regularly and not incorrectly referred to in GDR official publications as 'the Anglo-American terror-raids' on German cities. 'Murder is murder' are words that we must hope will return to haunt the British popular conscience.

Yet, at the same time as the Ridley affair, the revelations about the Chequers seminar on Germany showed that even at the highest level at which in modern Britain the political and intellectual worlds can interact (and quite evidently not all of the seminar was conducted at that level) the subject of Germany is peculiarly beset by illusions. The very term 'German reunification' is triply misleading.

First, the uniting of the Federal and Democratic Republics is far from being the whole of the issue. Unlike Bismarck's achievement in the years 1866–71, with which at first sight it seems comparable, it is but one of the consequences of a much later shift in world affairs: the disengagement of two super-powers whose military strength had polarized the loyalties of most other states, and the return to prominence of a unit older and politically and culturally more mature than either of them—Europe (Christendom, as it once was). To talk of the need to embed a united Germany in a united Europe is to treat as an imperative what is already a fact. The economic forces which made it too expensive for the Russian empire to continue to hold its tributaries in military subjection have already made the states of Western Europe too interdependent for them to be physically capable of waging against each other wars of national aggrandisement in the manner of more primitive nation-states, such as early twentieth-century Germany or contemporary Iraq. Equally, however, the agreeable notion must be resisted that popular revolution has brought down the dictatorships of Eastern Europe: the dictators fell, not because the people voted for capitalism or for union with the West, but because the Kremlin withdrew their cover. Why the Kremlin did so—why the revolutions were not suppressed as they had been before, and as they were in China—is too large a question to answer here, and it is not a part of the history of Poland, Bulgaria, Czechoslovakia, or East Germany either.

Secondly, as many in Germany have pointed out, not least Willy Brandt, 're-unification' is a thoroughly misleading term for the present process, the end-result of which has been the establishment of a wholly new political unit, with frontiers which have no precedent in German history. Shorn of territories to the West and to the East, some of which

had been German for longer than there have been English-speakers in Ireland, it is not a 're'-construction of the Reich of Bismarck, or of Hitler, or of any of their predecessors. It is an end to the pain of much personal separation, but it also has the excitement of a new political beginning.

Thirdly, however, the unanimous conclusion of the Chequers seminar seems to me quite wrong: the Germans, we (some months later) are told, have changed. The forty years of the Federal Republic, economically the most successful and politically the most democratic state in Europe, show that Germans have put their past behind them and, whether or not they are still aggressive, *angst*-ridden, assertive, bossy, etc., they are not going to repeat the appallingly destructive imperialist adventurism of the first part of this century. That we need no more dispute than a similar proposition about the imperialism of Britain, France, or Belgium. But we can have surer grounds for hoping that the achievements of the Federal Republic are not going to be abandoned than some putative change in national character. Germany has not changed: rather, the particular circumstances of the Federal Republic have permitted the re-emergence of some of the most deeply-rooted, and to an outsider most attractive, aspects of the German political and cultural tradition.

#### *'Other' Germanies*

The well-meaning friend of the Federal Republic may point us away from the Germany of Hitler and Goebbels, of Himmler and Eichmann, towards an 'alternative' Germany, a 'true' tradition—that of Bach and Beethoven, Goethe and Kant, and the failed coup of 24 July 1944. In the Nazi period itself, or its immediate aftermath, Curtius and Meinecke, Benn and Hesse did as much. There are, however, many Germanies and, alas, few can be called less 'true' than the others. The traditions of the land of poets and thinkers are not so easily separated from the catastrophic political developments of the twentieth century—and not only because, if there is a line from Bach to Beethoven, it presumably carries on to include their self-proclaimed successor, Richard Wagner, while any line from Kant and Goethe presumably passes through Nietzsche and Heidegger too. There is also the fact that poets and thinkers are no alternative to effective politicians, and that to wash your hands of the whole dirty business of politics, as many German intellectuals have done since the eighteenth century, can in practice (and even in theory) mean no more than to collaborate. Washing your hands is after all a tradition inaugurated by Pontius Pilate.

For a similar reason, it will not do, as some revisionist historians have recently proposed, to see the Second German Empire of 1866 to 1918 as just another bourgeois nation-state like England or France at the time, with its own form of parliamentary democracy (including Europe's largest and oldest surviving socialist party), and with markedly better

social security and technical education than prevailed further west (the 'aberrancy' in German history being thus limited to the period 1918—1945). If it were true that the united Germany of the 1990s is returning to the institutions and attitudes (as it is certainly not returning to the boundaries) of Bismarck's Reich, the other nations of Europe would have grounds for apprehension. Late nineteenth-century Germany differed from its Western neighbours not only in the pervasiveness and explicitness of its militarization, but also in the very cultural attitudes and social structures which enfeebled the opposition to Hitler: the subordination of the industrially and commercially active bourgeoisie to the officer class, and through them to the landowning, and in some cases still juridically sovereign, nobility; the cultural prominence of civil servants; the consequential tendency to envisage the nation as held together by a unified command structure, rather than by the shared loyalties of otherwise competing, or simply differing, interests; and the increasingly articulate dissociation of Christianity (especially, as the *Kulturkampf* showed, of Catholic Christianity) from the understanding of what it was to be modern, and to be German.

We must tap a deeper vein in German history if we are to identify what has made West Germany after 1945 so different: we must go back well before 1933, before 1866, even before 1648 and the end of the Thirty Years' War. Since the later Middle Ages, in fact, Germany has been, in the literal sense of the word, one of the most civilised of nations: a nation of cities. Visiting England in 1710, two Frankfurt noblemen commented on what seemed to them the extraordinary lack of cities: what called themselves such were simply unusually sprawling villages. The absence of physical walls meant an absence of mental and social cohesion, of local identity. The German towns, the great financial and artisanal centres, whether Free Cities or not, from Nuremberg and Augsburg to Ulm and Strasbourg, the Hanseatic towns and the commercial and (later) publishing centres of Frankfurt and Leipzig, had their heyday in the fifteenth and sixteenth centuries—though some of their characteristic attitudes survived much longer in the Low Countries and Switzerland, after they had gone into decline in Germany itself. If there is an alternative German culture it is here: in the world of Dürer and Riemenschneider, Erasmus and Eck, Sebastian Brant, Hans Sachs, and—one of its last representatives—the seventeenth-century realistic novelist Grimmelshausen. City culture was by definition a middle-class ('bourgeois') affair: the product of citizens who were their own masters organizing things for themselves, often after protracted disagreements. Money talked, but it was evident that there was a public realm—comprising, for example, building standards, or the training of apprentices, or the proprieties of dress—that should not be subject solely to the interests of individual profit. The constitutional privileges guaranteeing local autonomy were jealously defended—'particularism' this decentralized patriotism would be branded by the propaganda of

nineteenth-century nationalism. But trade was too important for local pride to become exclusive or introspective: to the North there was Britain and the Baltic, to the South the cities of Italy, to the West Flanders and the textile industry, to the East the spice and silk routes. Autonomy was possible only within interdependence, and what would now be called supranational institutions linked and safeguarded these local centres: the Hanseatic League, the Holy Roman Empire—which preserved this perspective on the German constitution until the end of the eighteenth century—and the Roman Catholic Church. Bourgeois, republican, communitarian, decentralized, and internationalist—that is the truly ‘other’ Germany.

### *The origins of authoritarianism*

The Holy Roman Empire was not, of course, simply a league of cities: its elastic structure accommodated also numerous hereditary (and ecclesiastical) principalities, and if the plump cities had the wealth, the lean and hungry principalities had (on the whole) the land and the military forces. In the Emperor the cities had a natural ally, for in the princes both had a common enemy. The balance of power between the central Imperial authority and the constituent territories shifted decisively with the Reformation, however, when certain of the princely territories arrayed themselves against the Emperor to protect the new religion and many of the cities joined them.

Luther is one of the most fascinatingly ambiguous figures in German cultural history, which is not poor in such ambiguity (Goethe and Brecht are similar cases). The son of an industrial entrepreneur, and in many ways a product of late medieval German urban piety, he none the less threw in his lot with the princes, both in their opposition to the Emperor and in their pretension to absolute authority within their own realms. The Lutheran Reformation was the point at which the assertion of individual freedom from institutional bondage went over into a surrender of institutional protection—whether of the Church, of the Empire, or of natural law—against the one free will that counts in a fallen world, that of the most powerful. New priorities were establishing themselves in Germany.

Whether religious change was a cause or simply an expression of this great shift is probably not determinable at all, and certainly not determinable here: the religious, economic, and political aspects of the new age have remained inseparable for all of its nearly 500 years. The decline of the German towns, which was already becoming apparent by the end of the sixteenth century, may have had many causes: a redirection of trade-routes, a prolonged economic crisis, most fundamentally perhaps the rise of the western European maritime powers as a competing focus of commercial and industrial activity. But a crucial precipitating factor was indubitably the terrible inheritance of the sixteenth-century revolt of the princes, the devastating religious war of

1618/1648—in particular the decision taken by Cardinal Richelieu in 1630 to prolong the war (which as an internal conflict was by then effectively settled) in order to break the power of the Empire. The latter phase of the Thirty Years' War was especially destructive, being compounded by plague and famine. The average population loss in the country was 40%, in the towns 33%. In 1800 the population of Nuremberg was still only half of what it had been in 1600.

More important still were the long-term political consequences of the war: by the time of the death of Louis XIV, who had continued the policy of ravaging western Germany, the Empire was scarcely more than a confederation of absolute princes, with little external constraint on their conduct and next to no internal opposition. Whether or not they were nominally independent, the cities of Germany were now relatively insignificant. The main economic activity in most territories was the maintenance of a standing army, and of the local court: capital was concentrated in the hands of the state, the principal entrepreneur was usually the local ruler, with his nearest competitor a member of the nobility, rarely of the bourgeoisie. The republican traditions and chartered privileges of towns and corporations were systematically ignored or suppressed in the interests of a centralized conduct of political and economic affairs by the prince and his bureaucracy. Appeal to the Imperial courts was difficult, expensive, and—with an eventual backlog of 16,000 cases—largely ineffectual. Protestant Germany knew no extra-territorial ecclesiastical authority. After 1648 the German bourgeoisie, by contrast with its self-confident counterparts in England, France, and the Low Countries, was economically weak and politically emasculated, and had lost any independent cultural role. The arts which now began to flourish were those dependent on courtly patronage: baroque and rococo architecture, opera and orchestral music, and the French-language theatre. By 1720, however, a new *modus vivendi* between the intellectual classes and the state power, a cultural compromise unique to Germany, had begun to establish itself.

For if Germany no longer had a capitalist bourgeoisie to compare with that of Western Europe, it had, thanks to its multiplicity of rulers and their increasing enthusiasm for centralized control, an exceptionally extensive class of officials, dependent on the state for their livelihood. The bureaucracy included not merely judicial and financial officials, but schoolteachers and in Protestant territories the entire clergy (appointed not by lay patrons, but through his Consistory by the ruler himself), and it was recruited and trained, and itself considerably swollen, by an unparalleled system of universities (over 50 of them, at a time when England numbered only 2). It was this official class which offered social advancement and material reward to the gifted poor, conditional only on their loyalty to the state system which patronized them, and to the person of its ruler. It was also this class which gave birth to the theological, philosophical, and literary culture of Germany's golden age, from the

end of the Seven Years' War in 1763 to the death of Goethe in 1832.

The peculiar character of that culture was a reflection of its peculiar social base. Cut off by static and monopolistic economies from the freedom of independent economic agents, and by despotic constitutions from the freedom of independent participants in a political process, Germany's middle class, while overtly accepting their subordination to the princely will, expressed their opposition in their cultivation of the freedom of the mind, and of ethical and religious, rather than political or material, self-determination. 'Reason as much as you like,' Kant has Frederick the Great say in his essay *What is Enlightenment?*, 'and about whatever you like—but obey!' Both Pietism and the rationalist Enlightenment of Leibniz and Wolff, superficially the bitterest of enemies, combined a belief in the internal autonomy of the individual with a belief in the impropriety, or even the logical impossibility, of any transeunt action by the individual on the order of things around him, with which his harmony was instead ensured by prior divine arrangement: 'the soul', said Leibniz, 'is absolutely sheltered from exterior things'. As music began its own venture into the interior, with the ever profounder exploration of key-relationships, the fiction of equal temperament provided an image of that compromise between the subjective and the objective orders by which the eighteenth-century German middle class accommodated itself to the political realities of absolutism. In the latter part of the eighteenth century, Pietism and Enlightenment converged in a process of secularization which generated a series of ever more daring and remote reinterpretations of Christianity: the cult of sentiment, ethical religion, the philosophy of history, critical, transcendental, and absolute Idealism, the theory of the Aesthetic, philhellenic and romantic literature.

The theologians, biblical critics, philosophers and poets responsible for this extraordinary intellectual efflorescence owed their distance from orthodoxy to more than a fortuitously early arrival in the Age of Doubt. Stipendiaries practically to a man of their local prince (the few tragic exceptions, such as Kleist and Hölderlin, whom conscience or circumstance deprived of office, merely prove the rule), they willingly, and often consciously, continued Luther's tradition of investing the state with a spiritual authority they would not accord to the Church of Rome: 'the modern' (that is, Fichteian) 'philosopher is necessarily a Protestant', remarked Fichte<sup>1</sup>, the author of *The Closed Mercantile State*. Enlightenment in Germany, and its continuation, Idealist philosophy, was the handmaid of the omniscient state, and its principal target was 'superstition', that is, the intellectual foundations of an independent institutional Church.

Neither the ossified bourgeoisie of the depopulated towns, nor the crumbling Imperial structure, let alone the old international Church, had the political or symbolic power to focus German aspirations as the century of nationalism opened. The model, and, some prescient spirits

already foresaw, the instrument of German nationhood was to be the absolutist principality, literally deified by Romantic political philosophy, and the clearest and certainly the most powerful example of it was the kingdom of Prussia. The Prussian reforms, begun after Napoleon's overwhelming defeat of the old regime at Jena in 1806, restructured the military, educational, and administrative systems, but not in order to extend elective procedures, nor to preserve the ancient German freedoms (which the city of Frankfurt had proudly announced to General Custine's advancing army were worth any liberty, equality, or fraternity the French could bring). The reforms completed the century-long surreptitious revolution by which the German middle classes established themselves as the true expression of the state, and of the German nation to come. But the middle classes that won this victory were not the economically independent members of a bourgeoisie who saw themselves as contracting to live together under certain conditions. They were an officialdom, a salaried bureaucracy, whose first principle was loyal and incorruptible service to a master not one of themselves, to the prince in whom the authority of the general will was held to be vested, and whose absolute right to obedience was in turn communicated to his agents. The officials who carried out this German equivalent of the French Revolution had no need to execute their king, they simply parcelled out his divine right among themselves. Thus did the old spirit of autocracy enter into the modernized German constitution of the nineteenth century.

### *Hegel and Marx*

The philosophy of Hegel is the supreme expression of Germany's social and intellectual revolution between 1770 and 1830. With its complimentary remarks in *The Philosophy of Right* about 'the universal class' of public officials, who transcend the particular interests both of landowners and of the industrial and commercial classes, and with its approval of a political order said to resemble that of contemporary Prussia, it has, however, often been seen as little more than a blatant and sophisticated apology for the corporatist and authoritarian state of which Hegel, as professor in Berlin, was a servant. But Hegel was Prussian neither by origin nor by upbringing, nor in his sympathies: he came from a corner of South-West Germany with a long history of constitutional conflict with its ducal rulers and the most important single influence on his political thinking was the French Revolution. If the lectures on the *Philosophy of History* conclude with a flattering picture of contemporary Germany (not Prussia), it is because Hegel—with possibly subversive optimism—is suggesting that it is here rather than in France, torn between a Catholic reaction and a nihilistic liberalism, or in pre-Reform Bill England, with its venal and still essentially medieval Parliament, Church, and army, that the principles of the French Revolution are being most concretely realized.



It may be difficult to recognize the reality of 1820s Germany in Hegel's picture of a collection of constitutional monarchies whose rulers, though hereditary, have little more to do than sign their name, where government is in the hands of officials, but all careers are open to talents, where fundamental rights of property and the person are universally acknowledged, all relics of the feudal system have disappeared, and the stronger states, in guaranteeing the independence of the weaker ones, both eliminate the likelihood of internal German wars and render the very boundaries of statehood theoretical. But this is not a picture drawn by an apologist of absolutism. Indeed it bears a more than passing resemblance to the European order that has developed as the age of nationalism has faded away. Hegel's classic status as *the* philosopher of the modern world, who has anticipated and comprehended everything from sociology to existentialism and deconstruction, derives from his integration of the perspectives both of Germany's uniquely developed official class and of the European bourgeoisie. Drawing on Adam Smith and Rousseau as much as on German Idealism and Romanticism, his political and historical thought shows the State as emerging from the necessities imposed equally by the natural environment, by unseen economic interrelationships ('the system of needs'), and by deliberate human self-understanding and self-regulation. The bourgeoisie—city-life in the broadest possible sense of the term—is essential to the State but not coterminous with it, and while limiting the independence of the institutions of civil society ('the corporations') the State positively requires for its own health their prosperity and diversity. The principle of co-operation between the different and even overtly opposed elements within the whole State structure, on which Hegel lays great emphasis (by contrast with the adversarial understanding of the separation of powers in the Franco-American revolutionary constitutions) is not merely a reflection of the eighteenth-century compromise between the German middle classes and their absolute princes: it is a resumption of the spirit of co-operation between private profit and public discipline which had for centuries been the ethos of the German cities.

After the European restoration, and with increasing rapidity after Hegel's death in 1831, Germany was overtaken by the Industrial Revolution. Between the failed uprising of 1848 and the final establishment of Bismarck's empire in 1871 the formerly agrarian German economy reached the industrial pre-eminence within Europe which it has never since lost. A huge social upheaval accompanied the change (the population of Berlin grew from 200,000 to 2,000,000), of which the most significant feature was that Germany now acquired a recognisable modern bourgeoisie: a middle class of private entrepreneurs and rentiers and their employees which was independent of the state and was the principal locus of economic power. The political structure of bureaucratic absolutism had been carried over by the German 'revolution' into the nineteenth century. But this political structure could

now no longer bear the same relation to the national culture as before, for now its patronage had a rival in that of a middle class that was economically increasingly its own master, however successfully it was still excluded from the overt exercise of political power. The social basis of German classical culture was overturned, and the new class looked for a culture of its own. It was not particularly successful, but an example of what it found is D.F. Strauss. Strauss started his intellectual life in the 1830s seeking shelter from atheism in Hegelianism; he ended it, after the Franco-Prussian War, asserting that modern man put his faith not in God but in insurance companies, and found edification not in sermons but in newspapers. Like the proselytizing materialist Ludwig Büchner, brother of the dramatist, he was a figure immediately comprehensible to his fellow-bourgeoisie across Western Europe: translated by George Eliot, he might be feared and repudiated by his English contemporaries, but he was acknowledged and understood by them as Kant and Hegel had not been.

The cult of interior freedom, which had been the basis of Germany's greatest achievements in literature and philosophy, and perhaps in music too, began to wither in the warmer drawing-rooms of the *Gründerzeit*. Before dying, however, it drooped: it survived well into the twentieth century but with an ever more problematic and degenerate air, the last figure to promote it with any simple-minded—if admittedly rather coarse and artificial—vigour being Richard Wagner. But Wagner was allowed his peculiar prolongation of the classical German literary and musical traditions by the bizarre historical accident that was Ludwig II of Bavaria, thanks to whom he could masquerade as the protégé of a court patron in a manner at least 50 years out of date. The majority of mid-nineteenth-century German intellectuals, unlike their predecessors in the previous century, could call on private means, sometimes their own, to support them (Schopenhauer, Strauss, Feuerbach, Marx and Engels, for example). But, as is the way, they were not usually grateful. They hankered after the high culture created by German officialdom, indeed in most cases they hankered after the offices as well (especially the professorships). To men intelligent enough to be aware of Germany's past, the new bipolarity of the national life seemed like a betrayal, and it was with all the resentment of a disestablished clerisy that Nietzsche (then briefly a professor) launched his onslaught on the betrayal by Strauss, and the Bismarckian Germany which he represented, of the cultural inheritance which in Nietzsche's view he had rendered indistinguishable from Philistinism. Wagner, as apparently the true inheritor, could applaud complacently—until Nietzsche saw through his masquerade and his turn came as well.

Karl Marx may have been no match for Nietzsche in the intelligence of his invective, but he chose his target a good deal more shrewdly: not the cultural representatives of the bourgeoisie, but the bourgeoisie itself. How little of Marx's passion is expended in sympathy with or even (by

contrast with Engels) interest in the lot of the poor'! His seething energies were directed almost exclusively at his enemy—*his* enemy, for a seemingly inexplicable personal animosity fires his writings, as it does Nietzsche's. What have I done to harm Nietzsche, Strauss wondered, and a similar question must have occurred to bourgeois readers, if there were any, of the *Communist Manifesto*. The answer is the same in both cases: Marx's enemy, like Nietzsche's, had deprived his generation, (and perhaps him personally) of the status they could have enjoyed as the rightful sons and heirs of Germany's great officials, perhaps specifically of Hegel, the greatest of them all. Even had Marx been able to have the academic career he originally desired, it could not in the new Germany have given him the role it had given to Hegel.

Exiled after 1848 to the land of bourgeoisie triumphant, Marx devoted the rest of his life, and all his virulence of mind, to one purpose. He sought to understand the force which, having been effectively absent from Germany for two centuries, had in his own time returned with such swiftness and power that by the time he was thirty it had shattered the cultural certainties into which he had been born. It is no coincidence that the revolutionary socialism which is incongruously appended to Marx's immensely penetrating but deterministic and apolitical analysis of the economic and cultural dynamic of capitalist society should flaunt the vocabulary of 'dictatorship', should scorn the political freedoms of liberalism, and should over and over again have lent itself to oppression, deceit, and murder in the interests of an omnipotent bureaucracy. Marx's cultural values were those of eighteenth-century German officialdom. (What is the difference between envisaging the withering away of the state, and envisaging, as the Romantics did, a perfect synonymy of the individual and the collective will?) He was nostalgic for the political order that had produced those values, and he added to them only a profound understanding and hatred of the forces that had made them impossible. His sense of public morality was no different from that of Frederick the Great. The lineage of the absolute state passes directly through authoritarian socialism.

#### *The national-socialist revolution*

It was of the essence of German classical culture that it was Protestant. The secularization of religious thought and language which is its central concern is, according to Hegel, the new principle introduced into world-history by the Reformation, reaching its culmination in his own time. Hegel is only being consistent when he identifies the vehicle of the secular—the concrete expression of the religious impulses of the individual—as the particular state to which the individual belongs. The Reformation was after all fought in order to dispute the authority of a supranational religious jurisdiction, and Hegel allows for no significant relation between states other than war. A perspective broader by far than that of the particular state is available through art, religion, and

philosophy—but none of these has an institutional embodiment that transcends the boundaries of the state. Yet, just as the German Enlightenment regularly stopped short of materialist atheism and carried its criticism of institutional Christianity only so far as to subordinate it to the prince, so even in the later nineteenth century the German political ascendancy—Kaiser, nobility, army, and officialdom—did not abandon a Christian allegiance. To be a Protestant was to be German (the literature of the time is full of such identifications), but it was to be Christian too. The *Kulturkampf* was a last attempt, after Reformation and Enlightenment, at an elimination from Germany of international Christianity in favour of the national variety.

Fifty years later, when the cultural conflict was renewed with much greater ferocity, it was not in the name of Christianity at all. The political ascendancy—the Führer and the party—was avowedly anti-Christian: one of the few such regimes to come to power in Europe, it revelled in its own pagan religious ceremonial and bogus mythology, and it conducted the nation's internal and external affairs in explicit disregard of the Christian principle (fundamentally important to Hegel) of the equal worth of all human beings<sup>2</sup>. Well over twenty million lives were extinguished as it showed the world that it meant what it said. How did this disaster come about?

Germany after the Industrial Revolution, and especially after the reorganization, as we may call it, of 1866–71, was a sadly divided polity. Political responsibility and the cultural high ground remained in the hands of the old and decreasingly representative absolutist order, while the new bourgeoisie which had created the nation's economic power and was now the source of its intellectual vigour lacked the political education and experience to formulate a role for itself. It inclined either towards a nationalist imperialism in imitation of Germany's western neighbours, or towards a socialism which was simply the old order called by another name but with its benefits distributed to a larger clientele. After 1914 the rickety national structure stood up less well than its competitors to the strains of war, and in the hour of defeat it tottered, like other residually feudal regimes before it, and indeed contemporary with it, into revolution. The 27 years after 1918 in Germany bear a strong structural resemblance to the 26 years after 1789 in France. In both cases a constellation of forces, led by a politically unpractised middle class, combined to overthrow a monarchical system. In both cases there followed episodes of attempted compromise with the past and ventures in constitutional government, punctuated by internal economic crisis, violence and disorder, and accompanied by unhelpful pressure from without, until a dictator took power who both made the revolution at home irreversible and engaged in megalomaniac schemes of foreign expansion which eventually led to his downfall. If there is a difference of two or three orders of magnitude between the two cases in respect of their recourse to surveillance, delation, judicial murder, and

massacre, it can largely be attributed to a hundred years' development of technology and mass industrial society, and to the experience of the mechanized mass-destruction of human 'material' in the Western trenches.

Because of the peculiarly evil ideology of National Socialism, and the unique horror of the crimes it perpetrated, it is easy to overlook the extent to which Hitler, as far as Germany itself was concerned, simply completed a revolution which had been begun by other agents. For all the vituperative hostility to the traitors of 1918 who had stabbed Germany in the back, there was no more question of Hitler restoring the Hohenzollerns than of Napoleon restoring the Bourbons. His Reich had no Kaiser, and no nobility either, except for decorative purposes. His *Gleichschaltung* swept away all traces of the feudal world, the multiple jurisdictions into which it had divided Germany. (A personal friend of mine recalls how as a boy before 1918 he performed the feudal service of harvesting for a reigning count.) Under the Nazis Germany became, for the first time in its history, a classless society<sup>3</sup>. Had it been such in 1919 the Weimar Republic might have survived. But in the 1920s there were still too many competitors for the loyalty of a nation that had with unexpected suddenness been genuinely enfranchised and made into the master of its own destiny. The social structure had been largely untouched by the abdication of the monarchy: the political horizons of the German bourgeoisie, from the industrialists, who subsidized Hitler, to the shopkeepers and artisans, who voted for him, were still limited to the options laid down in the old Empire—nationalism, socialism, and authoritarianism. Hitler wove all three together and, exploiting both the novelty of the modern media of mass-communication and the political inexperience of the new German public, made himself into Germany's first successful mass-politician. There lay ready to hand in the old culture the elements of the religion of the (German) state and the critiques of Christianity, culminating in that of Nietzsche. There was no longer any need to accommodate them to the established Protestant religion of the hereditary ascendancy, for that was swept away. Of the *ancien régime* there remained only the officials who had served it. Imbued with the principle of loyalty to the state power, they continued to do what they were told, and kept the wheels of absolutism turning after the demise of the princes. The secularized Christianity that had sustained them for so long reached its final dilution as the empty principle of obedience to the leader, whatever claptrap or wickedness he might mouth.

Perhaps such a humiliation could have been inflicted on that noble tradition only by the ex-Catholics that were Hitler and Heidegger. Conversely, the true opposition to National Socialism is not to be found among those who organized the conspiracy of July 1944, who—whatever moral outrage they may also have felt—were politically motivated by their loyalty to the pre-revolutionary norms of the old Empire, nor among those who chose the route of 'internal emigration' into the army

(where nonetheless some independence of the Nazi movement survived), nor again among those who dissociated themselves spiritually from what went on around them and whose intense but inactive suffering was praised by Hermann Hesse. The true opposition was that which appealed to an external authority. In other words, the opposition which emigrated to the countries at war with Hitler, which remained loyal, like Thomas Mann, to the unregarded principles of the Weimar Republic, which protected—as brave laypeople, priests and bishops did—individual victims of the racial laws, and which denounced the state's atrocities as contrary to common decency, to the word of God, and to the teaching of the universal Church.

### *The return of the other Germany*

The devastation to which Germany awoke in 1945, paralleled in its history only by the Thirty Years' War, was not inflicted simply by the Allied bombs that burnt its cities, nor by the Russian soldiery who had terrorized its countryside: it was also the result of a twelve-year social revolution in the course of which the mechanism of an absolute state had turned on and destroyed itself. Had it not been for the ghastly memories of what had been done in that time Germany could have felt relief. Four centuries of gathering despotism had come to a cataclysmic end, Germany and the world had paid dearly for Luther's stand and Richelieu's intrigues, but the German bourgeoisie was suddenly on its own: the kings and princes and emperors and leaders were gone, as in 1918 they were not, and in 1949, with 100 marks apiece, everyone started again on (theoretically) the same footing. It was a moment like that in Goethe's *Hermann and Dorothea* (a poem with no role, nor even a mention, for aristocratic rulers) when Hermann's father and mother meet in the hot ashes of their burnt-out town and pledge themselves to each other, to the future, and to hard work.

What has happened in the Federal Republic since has been a return to the only thing that was left, Germany's oldest and deepest traditions. The federal structure, a compromise with the much more elaborate historic subdivisions of Bismarck's state which is largely borrowed from the Weimar Republic, has proved its worth, not merely in limiting the power of central government, but in preserving that regionalism and local republicanism which from the Middle Ages onwards never wholly disappeared from view until 1933. The traditions of the old cities are particularly noticeable in the acceptance that, although it is essential to preserve competition in some areas, certain others are public rather than private responsibilities. Obvious examples are the urban transport and municipal facilities (that every former town of princely residence has its own theatre and opera-house is one of the happier legacies of the absolutist period). Also, though, one notes the, by Anglo-Saxon standards, remarkably restrained and co-operative attitudes of trade unions, a result no doubt partly of the much greater prevalence of

democratic and consultative procedures in the work-place. The most famous example of a public institution too important to be used for the sectional advantage of competing interests (in this case politicians) is the German currency, its integrity entrusted to the independent Federal Bank. A certain mystique still attaches to the caste of 'officials', but they no longer represent a state power in conflict with the capitalist class. The social market does not seem to be a *conceptual* problem in modern Germany. Germany's willingness to co-operate with other Western states, and its eagerness for the European idea, are not simply consequences of the immediate past—a desire to be loved, or to lose its former identity, or to find a new and acceptable field for imperialist sentiments. They are also part of a return to an internationalism which has always been natural to Germany, thanks to its central geographical position.

The accident that the Federal Republic has been the only predominantly Catholic state to call itself Germany has marked it off decisively from its predecessors and contributed as much as any other factor to the obsolescence of the classical culture. Now, of course, that culture is dead. Its social and political base was a conflict which was as old as the Reformation but which, as a peculiarly German phenomenon, is over. The energies generated by the conflict produced a literary, philosophical and musical tradition which in the first third of this century was *in extremis* and which after 1945 has found no successors. Only in socialist resentment of what Germany's resurrected cities have achieved have the traditions of the nationalist and Protestant past lived on. It is the writers who have both accepted the new world and who have also possessed the intellectual power to relate it to the past (Grass, for example, and Böll in some of his earlier works) who have had something to say to non-German speakers. Music, philosophy, and theology have been confined to a few scavengers in the ruins.

All this, of course, applies only to West Germany. For forty years the Russian forces of occupation kept in existence in the East a petrifact of the national socialist version of the German absolutist system. (The indistinctness of socialism and national socialism, except in respect of socialism's Christian inheritance, was here particularly evident.) Indeed, with a weird ingenuousness the government of the Democratic Republic used to boast of its continuity with the Prussian 'legacy' (even though none of its territory was technically part of the kingdom of Prussia until after the end of the Holy Roman Empire in 1806). A year ago, before the moral, administrative, and economic hollowness of the old regime had been fully exposed to comparison with the West, it seemed as if a reformed GDR still had the makings of an identity of its own, or at least of a distinctive contribution to a new German state. Now it is clear that all the GDR has to offer are the contents of its museums and its crèche service for working wives, and its best hopes for the future lie in as complete and rapid an absorption as possible into the Federal Republic.

With that, Germany will at last have become a modern state and its protracted and hideously costly Revolution will have come to a quiet end. If the new state is looking for a historical ancestor, it could do worse than look to that which its new boundaries suggest: the Holy Roman Empire, freed from both Prussian and Austrian ambitions for hegemony.

For the rest of Europe few grounds for anxiety need remain. There will, of course, be a marked cultural change in the Federal Republic through the sudden and very considerable rise in the representation of Protestantism, atheism, and socialism. It is, however, only the strengthening of socialism (the one surviving form of the worship of the German absolute state) and of its associate, neutralism (a left-sounding label for German nationalism), that is obviously problematic. Already in the Nazi period German Protestants had learned that to survive as Christians they had to identify themselves not with the state but with the opposition, and in the last years of the GDR this commitment became as significant politically as the anti-Caesarism of the Catholic Church in Poland. With the end of the real political basis for the Catholic-Lutheran divide we may actually hope to see progress towards healing the schism in the land in which it originated (and so also a much-needed strengthening of the reformist wing in the Roman Church). After all, Luther's original reforms, and much of the secularizing Enlightenment that developed out of them, have been gradually accommodated by the Catholic Church as inescapable features of the modern world.

Indeed, Germany's classical inheritance itself may, like many dead things, now be due for some revival. A modern state cannot really be called bourgeois in the sense in which that term can serve to differentiate early nineteenth-century France and England from the Germany whose officials created a culture so opaque to their European contemporaries. The dominant class in modern societies is not an officialdom, it is true. Neither, however, is it a bourgeoisie in Marx's sense of the term. In Marx's sense of the term, it is a proletariat, a class which lives by selling its labour, and such is the structure of modern societies that that labour is usually sold, directly or indirectly, to the state. For the functionaries that we all now are, the literature and philosophy of secularized Lutheranism, which at their best integrated both an official and a bourgeois perspective, have a continuing relevance. What is definitively past is the nationalist obsession with the absolute and unitary state that was built into German culture in the moment of the Reformation schism. In the post-War economic order nations of that kind no longer exist. It was Germany's misfortune, between the seventeenth and the twentieth centuries, to have developed to an extreme certain essential features of modernity—bureaucracy, intellectual secularization, and Lutheranism—in isolation from the institutions which might have moderated them—elective government, a popular culture, and the universal Church.<sup>4</sup> Provided it is adapted to a more international



perspective, as now it can be, the German classical tradition still has much to teach the world. It may even have something for participants in Chequers seminars. Now that no account of human political life can possibly ignore the supranational economic and institutional order, the prospects for a Catholic Hegelianism have never been so bright.<sup>5</sup>

- 1 J.G. Fichte, 'Alte und neue Welt', *Sämtliche Werke*, ed. I.H. Fichte, (reprinted Berlin, 1971), vol. 7, p. 609.
- 2 J.P. Stern, 'Introduction to the *samizdat* Czech edition', *Hitler: the Führer and the People* (London, 1990), p. xx.
- 3 'A Social Revolution?', Stern, *Hitler*, pp. 149—155.
- 4 It has been a tragic misfortune, but it has not been only that. In the same essay—*What is Enlightenment?*—in which Kant proclaims the absolute distinction in the Prussian state between freedom of thought and obedience in political action he goes on to argue that under such a constitution thought will make further and more daring advances than where a greater degree of political freedom (e.g. in England?) trammels thinkers with a prudential concern for the consequences of their ideas. We may, with hindsight, be as inclined to think him right as be relieved that the Prussian state is no longer with us.
- 5 Francis Fukuyama's article, 'The End of History' (*The National Interest*, Summer, 1989, pp. 3—18), contains too many undefined terms for its argument to be perfectly clear. But it certainly needs modification in two crucial respects: (1) What Fukuyama calls the triumph of the idea of liberalism is actually something rather different, namely, the establishment of a world-wide economic order, a global market, and the financial and communications systems to run it. (2) the 'end of history' has no doubt arrived—given *Hegel's definition of (world-)history* as the process in which one ruling national spirit, embodied in a particular state, is displaced by another; 'history' in that sense, however, has ended only because the definition is no longer adequate. World-history, however, as a genuinely international process, in which a world-wide economic order leads to a world-wide political and cultural order (itself a process completely describable in Hegelian terms) has only just begun (in 1945, perhaps?).

## Religion after Ceausescu

Mark Almond

Easter, 1990, was the first time that the greatest Christian festival could be openly celebrated in Romania for forty years. The coincidence of the Orthodox and Western calendars gave especial significance to the celebrations of the Easter Vigil in both Patriarchal and Catholic cathedrals in Bucharest and in churches throughout the capital and elsewhere. Romanian television celebrated the feast as it had Christmas, treating viewers to the incongruous sight of the presenters, all familiar

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