

## THE THIRD REICH: ORIGINS OF A MILLENARIAN SYMBOL

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Building upon briefer suggestions in the work of Eric Voegelin,<sup>1</sup> Norman Cohn<sup>2</sup> and Michael Barkun,<sup>3</sup> James M. Rhodes has presented a full-scale analysis of National Socialism as a millenarian mass movement.<sup>4</sup> His general model of millenarian movements specifies six aspects of the adherents' state of mind:

1. They all saw themselves as victims of catastrophes and developed peculiar disaster syndromes.
2. They experienced sudden revelations that explained their sufferings and promised certain salvation from these hardships.
3. In their mystical visions, they specifically discovered that their difficulties had been caused by the first principles of evil (i.e. either supernatural or incarnate devils), that they were being surrounded and crushed by secret agents of these demons, and that their societies were cooperating in their own downfalls by succumbing to clever temptations laid in their paths by the fiends.
4. They also learned from their revelations that they had been chosen to fight and defeat the wicked forces, thereby saving themselves and the world from the satanic afflictions.
5. They perceived that the demons and their minions were preparing to administer *coups de grâce* to the good and, therefore, that the eschatological hours of destruction for the devils and salvation for the righteous were at hand. Accordingly, they desired to rise up and eliminate evil from the earth by smashing its existential representatives in short, titanic wars (battles of Armageddon).
6. Finally, they hoped and believed that ultimately their blows against the demons would usher in paradisiacal orders of being (New Jerusalems).<sup>5</sup>

National Socialism was, according to Rhodes, a secular version of this state of mind.<sup>6</sup> Revolutionary transformation would be brought about by human action, not by divine intervention.<sup>7</sup>

Rhodes attempted 'to clarify all the millenarian symbols of the National Socialists by finding their origin in the real stimuli or motives they represented'.<sup>8</sup> This paper is a further exploration of one symbol only briefly treated by Rhodes, the 'Third Reich'. As Rhodes saw, the Third Reich was a 'secular analogue of Joachim of Flora's third age of the Holy Spirit'.<sup>9</sup> There is in fact a connection with Joachim, but it is remarkably complex and mediated through centuries of German intellectual history. Tracing the origin of the symbol will help to show how it could become an integral part of Nazi ideology. It will also illustrate how

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religious and secular millenarianism can nourish each other, in spite of overt ideological differences.<sup>10</sup>

The slogan of the 'Third Reich' was one of the most important propaganda weapons of National Socialism. An observer noted in 1933:

There came something entirely irrational, that is according to the prevailing opinions: the idea of the third Reich. This idea gripped the Germans; it gripped the deeply rooted and the totally uprooted: it gripped the beings with whom one could neither talk nor argue.<sup>11</sup>

It appears that the slogan was brought into National Socialism by Otto Strasser, when he joined the movement in the mid-1920s.<sup>12</sup> But the acknowledged creator of the term was Arthur Moeller van den Bruck, whose book *Das dritte Reich* (1932) was a major text of German conservatism. Moeller popularised the idea that the Weimar Republic must be replaced by a new empire, which would be the 'third' because it would follow the mediaeval Holy Roman Empire of the German Nation and the empire created by Bismarck in 1871. Was Moeller's concept of the Third Reich obtained simply by counting, as has been alleged?<sup>13</sup> If so, it would not be particularly interesting for students of political ideas. But in fact the term Third Reich took shape in a centuries-long course of development which must be understood before all its connotations can be appreciated.<sup>14</sup> This paper sets forth the development schematically in a series of three (!) stages: the non-political or cultural background, the politicisation of the 'Third Reich' in World War I, and the definitive formulation of the symbol by Moeller van den Bruck.

#### CULTURAL BACKGROUND

First, a comment about the word *Reich*. It can mean 'empire' in a purely descriptive, political sense, although even at this level it can have religious overtones, since the mediaeval Germanic empire was a *sacrum imperium*, the *Heilige Römische Reich Deutscher Nation*. The word *Reich* also has an explicit religious denotation in phrases like *Gottesreich*, *Himmelsreich* or *Tausendjähriges Reich*. In particular, it refers to the Kingdom of God on earth in the invocation in the Lord's Prayer: 'zu uns komme Dein Reich' ('Thy Kingdom come'). Finally, *Reich* can have a more abstract philosophical meaning, perhaps best translated as 'realm'. When Engels, for example, speaks of socialism as a *Reich der Freiheit* ('realm of freedom'),<sup>15</sup> he means not an empire or a divine kingdom but a new age with an unprecedented social order in which human life will be qualitatively different. In the development of the Third Reich as a symbol, all three dimensions of the word *Reich* have come into play, and the effectiveness of the slogan depends crucially on ambiguity as to what *Reich* actually means.

The remote ancestor of the Third Reich is the speculative historical system of Abbot Joachim of Flora or Fiore (ca 1145–1202). Joachim divided world history into three great *status* or ages, corresponding to Father, Son and Holy Spirit. The Hebrew religion was the Age of the Father and Roman Catholicism the Age of the Son. The Age of the Spirit, soon to be inaugurated, would carry

Christianity to a higher level through a new pentecostal effusion of the Holy Spirit. The Church of the third age, purified by orders of reforming monks, would be less dependent on material aids like the sacraments and more endowed with direct spiritual experiences of contemplation and illumination.<sup>16</sup>

Joachim's construction of history as a teleological sequence of three ages, in which the present moment is a transition to the millennial third age, has had a remarkable influence. First adopted by the radical wing of the Spiritual Franciscans, it became a common element of popular religious movements in the Middle Ages and Reformation. As late as 1878, the uprising of David Lazzaretti in Italy drew inspiration from Joachim's myth of the three ages.<sup>17</sup>

More important for our purposes than this subterranean stream of popular piety is the secularisation of the symbol of the third age which began with Lessing's *Education of the Human Race* (1780). At the height of the Enlightenment, Lessing sketched an interpretation of history as the progressive enlightenment of mankind. The three great phases of history were the Old Testament of the Hebrews, the New Testament of Christianity, and the coming age of tolerant, enlightened, non-dogmatic religion portrayed in Lessing's play *Nathan der Weise*. In this new dispensation, men would no longer need the fables of Christianity and its mythical promises of reward and punishment in the afterlife; they would 'do good because it is good, not because an arbitrary reward is set up'. Lessing explicitly referred to the mediaeval followers of Joachim: 'Perhaps their three ages of the world was no empty conceit....They were simply ahead of themselves'.<sup>18</sup> Lessing's own scheme was fundamentally similar to Joachim's except that he substituted the notion of rational enlightenment for Joachim's experience of meditative spiritual illumination.

Lessing's secularised version of Joachim's model became almost a standard feature among the philosophers of German Idealism. It appeared in one form or another in writings of Schiller, Hegel, Schelling and Krause.<sup>19</sup> In each case it expressed the Idealist consciousness of epoch, of living at a critical juncture in history. It was part of the experience analysed by Hans Urs von Balthazar as the 'apocalypse of the German soul'.<sup>20</sup>

The Idealist writers did not politicise the third age; to them it represented an era in human consciousness, not a new political system or form of government. But political consequences were soon drawn by a new generation of writers who interpreted the hoped-for third age in social and political terms. A politicised third age became a commonplace among nationalist writers influenced by the Idealist philosophers. Giuseppe Mazzini spoke of the 'Third Rome' of Italian nationalism, August Cieszowski postulated the Poles as the chosen people of the third age, and Moses Hess cast the Jews in much the same role.<sup>21</sup> The Third Reich is thus one of a family of futuristic symbols expressing belief in universal renovation through the assertion of national identity. The rest of this article explores in more detail the emergence of the Third Reich as a specifically German nationalist symbol. The process was more protracted in Germany than elsewhere and requires scrutiny of several stages of development.

The dramatist Ibsen used the concept of a third epoch or Reich in his play *Emperor and Galilean* (1873), which narrates the conflict between the Catholic Church and the Emperor Julian the Apostate. Ibsen apparently conceived the idea of the play when he first visited Rome in 1864, but he did not finish the text

until he had lived in Germany for several years. The war between France and Prussia and the creation of Bismarck's empire excited his imagination. He later wrote to a friend:

*Emperor and Galilean* is not the first work I wrote in Germany, but doubtless the first that I wrote under the influence of German spiritual life. . . . My conception of world history and of human life had hitherto been a national one. It now widened into a racial conception; and then I could write *Emperor and Galilean*.<sup>22</sup>

The play hinges on the struggle between Julian and Christ, each of whom represents in himself an era of world history. Julian seems to exemplify the pagan ideal of harmonious beauty and cosmic order, which is imperilled by the new Christian doctrines of asceticism and contempt for the world. Julian's struggle against the Church fails because he sides with the pagan past against Christianity. The only way to defeat Christianity is to go beyond it, to absorb its message of radical spirituality into a higher synthesis. This is explained to Julian in the play:

There are three empires, first, that empire which was founded on the tree of knowledge; then that empire which was founded on the tree of the cross. . . . The third is the empire of the great mystery, the empire which shall be founded on the tree of knowledge and the tree of the cross together, because it hates and loves them both, and because it has its living springs under Adam's grove and Golgatha.<sup>23</sup>

At the end of the play Julian is defeated and dies, but the prophet Maximos, who appears to speak for Ibsen, still maintains that 'the third empire shall come' and 'the spirit of man shall reclaim its heritage'.<sup>23</sup>

The racial connotations which the Third Reich had for Ibsen are not obvious in *Emperor and Galilean*, which portrays the coming age as a transformation of consciousness, a post-Christian state of humanistic enlightenment. This formulation appealed to the Nietzschean spirit so widespread among German intellectuals at the end of the nineteenth century. Something similar appeared in the novel *Das dritte Reich* published in 1900 by the popular German author Johannes Schlaf. The novel concerns a young Berlin scholar, Dr Liesegang, who has become obsessed with the notion that a new age is dawning and that he will be the Adam of a new race of men. Closetted in his room for days at a time, Liesegang pores over the apocalyptic passages of the New Testament, comparing them to the writings of Fichte, Nietzsche and Stirner. From all sides he receives confirmation that the 'third testament'<sup>23</sup> has arrived, that the Paraclete has been poured out upon modern man:

In thinking about Darwin, Stirner, and Nietzsche, he had built up an entirely original and unique theory. According to this theory, we were living in an age of ever increasing confusion and mixture of the races, of an unheard-of international technology, of attempts to emancipate women. Thus there must take place a new psychological selection of a number of the most advanced individuals, men without prejudice, who would understand and encompass the entire breadth of this international culture of humanity, producing in themselves a new organic unity. The focus of this selection should be nothing else than the freest competition of an essentially new type of relation between the sexes.<sup>24</sup>

The new Adam must find his Eve. However, Liesegang is unable to transform his fantasy into reality; he falls in love with the girlfriend of his best friend, but is pathetically unable to win her away. In the end he commits suicide, leaving the reader to reflect over the gulf between Liesegang's grandiose pretensions and his pathetic performance.

The psychology of this process of self-destruction is mercilessly portrayed. As Liesegang is unable to translate his will into action, he shifts increasingly into a world of dreams where his will meets no obstacles:

He remembered the saying of Novalis, that the highest and freest condition of the soul was a kind of magic in which I measure myself by my own standard and shape a world from the most arbitrary impulses . . . .

This room and these objects were a dream, oh, so infinitely stale, decayed, impossible!

And then he knew: for a long time he had been in another, a new reality.<sup>27</sup>

For Liesegang, the Third Reich is a self-created reality, projected into the future to compensate for the intolerable tedium of the present.

Schlaf's novel seems to caricature the aspiration for the Third Reich, but other writings show that he took the idea quite seriously.<sup>28</sup> He held that mankind would be transformed by a 'new elite' of 'absolute individuals'. Liesegang was for Schlaf a failed example of the type of man that would soon remake society. However there was no obvious political content to this Nietzschean vision of the coming superman.

## POLITICISATION

An important step towards politicising the Third Reich was taken in Ernest Krieck's wartime book *Die deutsche Staatsidee* (1917). Krieck was a pedagogue who later made a name for himself as an important conservative in the Weimar period and ultimately as National Socialist minister of education.<sup>29</sup> During World War I, he was simply a teacher and author who volunteered for the army but was soon discharged because of illness. Krieck, like so many German intellectuals, was intoxicated by his wartime experience of selfless service and duty to the nation. He wrote years later:

When destiny reached for us in 1914, no one was asked about his opinions, his personal position, his political or religious beliefs. We were simply placed by destiny at the head of our people, in the great alliance. Here each had to prove himself to the very end. The solidarity of the people swept over us like fate . . . . The age of liberalism was ended, the age of peoples dawned.<sup>30</sup>

This unforgettable experience of participation in the *Volk* determined the course of Krieck's later writings; he became an advocate of an organic, holistic view of society, which eventually led to his affiliation with the National Socialists. He cast his views into a philosophy of history which saw the present as the transition to the Third Reich, which was not only a new state of consciousness but also a

new socio-political formation—the ‘age of peoples’, specifically of the German people.

‘The Third Reich’, wrote Krieck, ‘brings transcendence and immanence together’. It is ‘the realm of the Spirit: in a certain way, it is the merging of the realm of nature and of the transcendent Kingdom of God’.<sup>31</sup> Historically, the Third Reich follows Christianity, as the latter succeeded ancient paganism. ‘The point of departure for the ancients was the knowledge of the cosmos, the natural regularity of the universe.’<sup>32</sup> Man was bound up in a comfortable and protective universe. Christianity divided the universe into this-worldly and other-worldly sectors, and posited man’s salvation in the other world. This rupture is only overcome when the Third Reich reunites immanence and transcendence.

These themes had been equally present in Ibsen and Schlaf, but Krieck took a crucial step towards politics. He identified the Third Reich as a peculiarly German concept and gave it a German prehistory. The development began with the German mystics of the Middle Ages, like Eckhart and Tauler, who first recognised that divinity is found not in the other world of transcendence but in the depths of the soul. ‘Between it and its God stands nothing, no mediator, no sacrament, no prescribed duty, no creed, no prior revelation; all is presence, free spirit.’<sup>33</sup> It is not mysticism in general which ‘contains the gem of the new, future world of the spirit’; it is only ‘German mysticism’.

With reference to more recent events, Krieck spoke only of German developments—Pietism and Enlightenment, *Sturm und Drang*, the philosophy of the spirit, etc. Although it was not spelled out precisely, the inference was not hard to draw: it is the Germans who have created the vision of the Third Reich. The juxtaposition of two statements from Krieck’s book which are found only ten pages from one another illustrates his combination of universal human salvation with the narrower concerns of nationalism:

The Third Reich . . . knows a new, more deeply grounded human dignity. This is, however, no longer pride in possession of something, but a challenge, a duty. The spiritual man is always becoming, one whose value and dignity lie before him in the future, in the ideal: the moral Kingdom of God on earth.<sup>34</sup>

The nation is the protector of a holy fire which is destined to enlighten mankind. When the Holy Spirit settles on a people, then it receives a calling, a duty: and the greatness of that people is measured by its fulfilment of its duty.<sup>35</sup>

There is no doubt that in Krieck’s mind it was the Germans upon whom the Holy Spirit had descended.

Krieck later claimed that his was the first application of the Third Reich to political realities,<sup>36</sup> but in fact he only partially politicised the term. He made it the property of a single nation, the emblem of their future; but the political content was still rather vague, consisting of duty, the organic and corporate state, social hierarchy, and similar abstractions. There was not yet a tangible political programme associated with the term.

A similar limitation marks the use of the term Third Reich in the pages of the conservative journal *Die Tat*. Founded in 1909 as part of the cultural opposition to the Second Reich, the journal became increasingly political after it was taken over by the publisher Eugen Diedrichs in 1912. Diedrichs published an article

entitled 'Das Kommen des dritten Reiches' in the Christmas issue of *Die Tat*, 1918. The timing must have seemed particularly appropriate to the author, for he was proposing an inversion of the traditional Christian doctrines of Incarnation and Redemption. In front of the text of the article stood as a motto a single sentence summarising the Gnostic inversion of Christian belief: 'Christ hung on the cross to redeem God, not man'.<sup>37</sup> Man is no longer saved by God; by his own work, his own activity, man redeems God. God loses His stature as the transcendent source of order; He is something to be attained, a 'problem' or a 'task' as Diedrichs says. God is not Being; he is the 'becoming God' of Meister Eckhart, and the process of becoming is located in man himself, who 'finds divinity in his own spiritual being'.<sup>38</sup>

This merger of transcendence and immanence results in the expectation of a new age and the glorification of human will and activity. 'The redeeming word will come, for the Third Reich is near at hand.' Man has not yet fulfilled himself, but the time is not far off when he will enter his full maturity, his *Mannesalter*. He has long since outgrown the age of polytheism, when man's naïve consciousness had not yet sensed the division of the world into immanence and transcendence. 'The *Kindesalter* is under the sign: I am', a simple acceptance and affirmation of existence. Christianity destroyed this simple relationship by postulating a God above all; this was the adolescence or *Jünglingsalter* of the race, the period of conflict within the soul. Unreflective existence was replaced by duty and obedience to the higher power; 'the *Jünglingsalter* is under the sign: Thou shalt'. But in the Third Reich foretold by Ibsen, this inner division will be overcome. Humanity and divinity will be reunited in the human will. Thus 'the third stage, the age of manhood speaks: I will'.<sup>39</sup>

Diedrichs' Christmas apocalypse contained no political references except the cryptic statement that 'the *Volk* that produces souls who fight for God will be the victor in the struggle of peoples'. Although Diedrichs wrote prolifically in *Die Tat* about political and social questions, he did not make a slogan out of the Third Reich. An article in 1919 by a member of the *Freideutsche Jugend*, however, shows some possibilities of the term. Most of the brief statement was devoted to explaining why the Free German Youth was 'socialist' rather than liberal. Socialism was young, vital, growing; it was the politics of youth. The bourgeois statesmen of Germany might be more sensible, more knowledgeable about political and economic realities; but that was not a sufficient reason for following their lead. 'This bourgeois intelligentsia is sometimes a little too mature; it has too much culture and too little spirit, too much civilisation and too little genuine, living culture.' There was, on the other hand, among the socialists 'a streak of the crude, unbalanced, chaotic, uneducated', as well as 'a dash of Dostoyevskian humanity, warmth, vitality, young force of will, and movement of the heart—what is missing today in the bourgeoisie'.<sup>40</sup> Since socialism (or more precisely middle class youth; Free German 'socialism' had little to do with genuine workers' parties) had all these good qualities, the future belonged to it regardless of considerations of practicality.

The Third Reich, the Reich of the future, of fulfilment, will only arise when the renewal of souls brings at the same time a reform of life. Hand in hand, man's

essence and life, being and appearance must work together. When youth—the future, the idea that is becoming living—examines the parties, we will draw the political consequences for the Free German Youth: we will be socialist, not *kulturkonservativ*.<sup>41</sup>

The survey thus far reveals a curious assortment of ideas attached by different authors to the symbol of the Third Reich: socialism, conservatism, nationalism, and Nietzschean individualism. The common denominator of all of them is the indictment of bourgeois liberalism as an alienated existence. The individual in a liberal society is perceived as estranged not only from his true self but from genuine communion with others. His internal contradictions between duty and desire are mirrored in the social antagonisms among classes, groups and nations. Whatever the differences among them, all prophets of the Third Reich saw in it a millenarian transcendence over these divisions, both personal and social. The new man of the third age, freed of bourgeois hypocrisies and inhibitions, would participate in a truly harmonious society. This millenarian vision of salvation on earth expressed by the symbol of the Third Reich is more fundamental than the particular features with which the new age was endowed by different visionaries.

#### DEFINITIVE FORMULATION

Such were the connotations of the Third Reich when Moeller van den Bruck gave it its definitive form by wedding it to the re-establishment of a German empire in Central Europe.<sup>42</sup> Moeller was certainly aware of the development of the term. A widely read student of literature, who lived for a time in Scandinavia, he would have known Ibsen's works. He also reviewed Schlaf's novel *Das dritte Reich* in 1902.<sup>43</sup> In 1906 he used the term Third Reich in a way which makes sense only if he assumed that his readers would be familiar with its meaning: he spoke of certain writers whose concept of a Third Reich, even though originally a product of the imagination, forced them into some contact with social and political realities.<sup>44</sup> After the end of World War I, Moeller became personally acquainted with Ernest Kreick and Eugen Diedrichs, working with both in the conservative movement.

Another influence on Moeller was his association with the Russian emigre Dmitry Merezhkovsky.<sup>45</sup> Moeller met him in Paris when Merezhkovsky went into exile after the revolution of 1905. After World War I, they collaborated on the first complete German edition of the works of Dostoyevsky. Merezhkovsky is well known for propounding another Joachimite doctrine, that of Third Testament Christianity. Like Dostoyevsky, he held the Slavs, particularly the Russians, to have a divine mission of inaugurating a new age, superseding the corrupt world of Western Europe. There would be a new revolution, a Third Testament of the Holy Spirit:

In the first kingdom of the Father, the Old Testament, was revealed the power of God, as truth; in the second kingdom of the Son, the New Testament, the truth reveals itself as love; in the third and last kingdom of the Spirit, the Coming Testament, love will be revealed as freedom. And in this last kingdom will be



pronounced and heard the last name of the Coming Lord, a name as yet unpronounced and unheard of any: The Liberator.<sup>46</sup>

Actually, Merezhkovsky's nationalism was rather restricted. It was not the Russian state, nor even the Russian people, but the Russian intelligentsia which would 'become the Mind of all Humanity . . . the Kingdom not only of the Father and the Son, but of the Father, the Son, and the Holy Ghost'.<sup>47</sup> The Russian intelligentsia participated in what Merezhkovsky, following Dostoyevsky, called 'the underground', that is 'the supreme libertarian revolt of the individual against social and natural order; it is the *non-acceptance of the world*'.<sup>48</sup> This experience of the underground, the rejection of the world as it is, united Merezhkovsky and Moeller, both prototypical Bohemian intellectuals whose greatest scorn was reserved for what Merezhkovsky called *meshchamstvo*—petty-bourgeois mediocrity and philistinism.

Merezhkovsky injected his Third Testament Christianity into the edition of Dostoyevsky. Contributing a preface entitled 'Die religiöse Revolution' to the volume of Dostoyevsky's *Politische Schriften* (1922), he argued that the great novelist's support of the tsarist autocracy and of the Orthodox Church was only a mask, not his true face. The reactionary political stance concealed a burning desire for the Second Coming.

Dostoyevsky believed or wanted to believe his religion was Orthodoxy. But his true religion was . . . that which will come after Christianity, after the New Testament. It was apocalypse, the coming Third Testament, the revelation of God's Trinity, the religion of the Holy Spirit.<sup>49</sup>

Moeller, though not a Christian, would have been touched by these statements; he also longed for 'that other Christianity of anger and will, which would be the true Christianity of our humanity'.<sup>50</sup>

Moeller wrote *Das dritte Reich* to create a third party which would overcome the cleavage between left and right. In fact, he originally intended to call his book *Die dritte Partei* until friends pointed out that readers might think his 'third party' would be a political party like the existing ones.<sup>51</sup> But what Moeller had in mind was more like a mass movement or crusade than the organisation of a party apparatus. He wanted to unite the extremes of the political spectrum in a revival of national spirit. 'We must have strength to live in antitheses', he wrote.<sup>52</sup> Conservatives—excluding reactionaries who simply wished to restore the past—appreciated the organic continuity of society and the role of values in transmitting the national life. They rejected the shallow individualism and rationalism of liberal democracy. In a different way, the proletariat was in revolt against liberalism, but had been misled by Marxian socialism into looking for an international solution to its problems. The challenge for conservatives was to win over the working-class to the cause of the nation. 'Every people has its own socialism', wrote Moeller.<sup>53</sup> Conservatism would have to become revolutionary by absorbing the positive aspects of socialism. This union of left and right, joined together through allegiance to the nation against the common enemy of liberalism, would be a revolutionary programme to capture the imagination of the new generation:

German youth to-day recognises the liberal is *the enemy*. Liberalism is the death of nations. . . . The moment has come in which men and nations alike seek cohesion once more, that cohesion which the age of reason thought it could dispense with.<sup>54</sup>

The concrete objective of the movement would be the creation of a new German empire in Central and Eastern Europe. 'The Third party wills the Third Reich.'<sup>55</sup> Although Moeller was not precise about his irredentist objectives, they definitely included reunion with the German-speaking populations outside the Weimar Republic, such as Austrians, Sudeten Germans or Baltic Germans. He certainly had in mind an organised state, not just a new stage of consciousness. 'The *Third Reich* will be an empire of organisation in the midst of European chaos.'<sup>56</sup>

At the same time, Moeller retained the transcendental and millenarian connotations which had already gathered about the term 'Third Reich'. That he had earlier usages in mind is clear from the preface; 'It [the Third Reich] is an old German conception and a great one. It arose when our First Empire fell; it was early quickened by the thought of a millennium.'<sup>57</sup> He further characterised the existing concept of the Third Reich as apolitical:

We must be careful to remember that the thought of the Third Reich is a philosophical idea; that the conceptions which the words 'Third Reich' arouse—and the book that bears the title—are misty, indeterminate, charged with feeling; not of this world but of the next.<sup>58</sup>

His Third Reich, in contrast, symbolised a political programme:

Let us be perfectly explicit: the thought of the Third Reich—to which we must cling as our last and highest philosophy—can only bear fruit if it is translated into concrete reality. It must quit the world of dreams and step into the political world.<sup>59</sup>

Yet even as Moeller insisted on the pragmatic character of his programme and his slogan, he continued to play on the messianic connotations of the Third Reich. He called it the 'Final Empire (*Endreich*), ever promised, never fulfilling'.<sup>60</sup> It was a transhistorical goal, subsuming in itself the first two empires. Thus Moeller could write: 'There is only *one Reich*, as there is only *one Church*.'<sup>61</sup> Most explicitly: 'We believe that the Second Reich was only the transition to a Third Reich, which is promised us, and for which we must live, if we are to live at all.'<sup>62</sup>

## CONCLUSION

This historical overview shows that the concept of the Third Reich, even before it was appropriated by the National Socialists, was already a well-developed millenarian symbol. While it stood for a political programme of imperial expansion, it also carried sweeping connotations of individual and cultural transformation. It was already familiar to many German intellectuals of conservative, nationalist or socialist persuasion. It was, therefore, ideally suited to become a prominent slogan of the National Socialist mass movement.

Rhodes has coined the terms 'ontological catastrophe' and 'ontological hysteria' to designate the formative experience of many National Socialists.<sup>63</sup> They saw the

political disorder of the Weimar period as a threat to the meaning of existence. The promised Third Reich, a transformed polity and society, was a refuge from perceived catastrophe and a charm against hysteria.

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#### NOTES

1. Eric Voegelin, *The New Science of Politics* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1952), pp. 113–14, 124.
2. Norman Cohn, *The Pursuit of the Millennium*, 2nd edn (New York: Harper & Row, 1961), pp. 308–14. Cohn reduced the scope of his remarks on Communism and National Socialism in the 3rd edn of his book but noted in the foreword that 'I am still convinced that the argument is valid' (New York: Oxford University Press, 1970), p. 11.
3. Michael Barkun, *Disaster and the Millennium* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1977), pp. 186–94.
4. James M. Rhodes, *The Hitler Movement: A Modern Millenarian Revolution* (Stanford: Hoover Institution Press, 1980).
5. *Ibid.*, pp. 30–1.
6. *Ibid.*, p. 18.
7. Yonina Talmon recognises the category of secular millenarian movements. See 'Millenarism', *International Encyclopedia of the Social Sciences* (n.p.: Crowell Collier and Macmillan, 1968), Vol. X, p. 360. The seminal works on the subject are J.L. Talmon, *The Origins of Totalitarian Democracy* (New York: Praeger, 1960) and *Political Messianism: The Romantic Phase* (London, 1960).
8. Rhodes, *The Hitler Movement*, p. 19.
9. *Ibid.*, p. 76.
10. Thomas Flanagan, 'Social credit in Alberta: a Canadian "cargo cult"?' *Archives de Sociologie des Religions* 34 (1972), 46–8.
11. Andreas Holfeld, *Unsere geschichtliche Verantwortung* (Leipzig, 1933), p. 5; cited in Fritz Stern, *The Politics of Cultural Despair* (Garden City, New York, 1965), p. 34.
12. Richard Schapke, *Die schwarze Front* (Leipzig, 1932), p. 41.
13. Kurt Sontheimer, *Antidemokratisches Denken in der Weimarer Republik* (München, 1962), p. 300: 'Moeller gewinnt die Zahl drei durch einfaches Abzählen'.
14. National Socialist authors also maintained this point. Two examples are Heinz Hertel, *Das dritte Reich in der Geistesgeschichte* (Hamburg, 1934); and Julius Petersen, 'Die Sehnsucht nach dem Dritten Reich in deutscher Sage und Dichtung', *Euphorion* 35 (1934), 18–40; 145–82.
15. *Socialism: Utopian and Scientific* in Karl Marx and Frederick Engels, *Selected Works* (Moscow, 1968), p. 432.
16. On Joachim and his influence in the Middle Ages, see Marjorie Reeves, *The Influence of Prophecy in the Later Middle Ages* (Oxford, 1969).
17. E.J. Hobsbawm, *Primitive Rebels* (New York, 1959), pp. 65–73.
18. G.E. Lessing, 'Die Erziehung des Menschengeschlechts', *Gesammelte Werke* (Berlin, 1956), Vol. VIII, pp. 611–13.
19. Friedrich Schiller, *Sämtliche Werke* (Stuttgart, Säkular-Ausgabe, n.d.), Vol. XII, p. 363; G.F.G. Hegel, *Lectures on the Philosophy of History* (London, 1955), *passim*; Thomas Schelling, *System der transcendentalen Idealismus*, in *Werke* (Munich, 1965), Vol. II, pp. 603–4; Thomas Schelling, *Philosophie der Offenbarung* (Darmstadt, 1966),

- Vol. II, pp. 302–3; Karl Krause, *Lebenlehre oder Philosophie der Geschichte*, 2nd edn (Leipzig, 1904), p. x.
20. Hans Urs von Balthasar, *Der Apokalypse der deutschen Seele* (Leipzig, 1937).
  21. Attilio Pepe, 'Mazzini e Gioachino da Fiore', *Archivio storico per la Calabria e la Lucania* 24 (1955), 489–96; August Cieszkowski, *Selected Writings* (Cambridge, 1970), pp. 40–8; August Cieszkowski, *The Desire of all Nations* (London, 1919), pp. 33–4, 74–5; Thomas Flanagan, 'Millenarian fantasy and the origins of zionism', *Middle East Forum* 48 (1972), 45–60. The most comprehensive treatment of the Joachamite tradition is Henri de Lubac, *La Postérité spirituelle de Joachim de Flore*, 2 vols. (Paris, 1978–80). Lubac, however, touches only briefly on the connections between Joachimism and the symbol of the Third Reich (Vol. II, pp. 382–3).
  22. Letter to Julius Hoffroy, Munich, 26 February 1888. Cited in William Archer, ed., *The Collected Works of Henry Ibsen* (New York, 1911), Vol. V, 'Introduction'.
  23. James McFarlane and Graham Ortin, eds., *The Oxford Ibsen* (London, 1963), Vol. IV, p. 259.
  24. *Ibid.*, p. 458. After World War I in Germany there was an obscure association called *Gesellschaft für individualistische Kultur* (or *Stirnerbund*). Its journal *Der Einzige* claimed Ibsen's Third Reich as its motto. See also a book by one of its founders, Rolf Engert, *Henrik Ibsen als Verkünder des dritten Reiches* (Leipzig, 1921). There seems to be no direct link between these intellectual anarchists and the revolutionary conservatism of men like Moeller.
  25. Johannes Schlaf, *Das dritte Reich* (Berlin, 1900), p. 14.
  26. *Ibid.*, p. 229.
  27. *Ibid.*, p. 335, 338.
  28. Johannes Schlaf, *Das absolute Individuum und die Vollendung der Religion* (Berlin, 1910), *passim*.
  29. On Krieck, see Phillipp Hordt, *Ernest Krieck: Volk als Schicksal und Aufgabe*, 2nd edn (Leipzig, 1936).
  30. Ernest Krieck, *Die deutsche Staatsidee*, 2nd edn (Leipzig, 1934), p. 3.
  31. Ernst Krieck, *Die deutsche Staatsidee* (Jena, 1917), p. 31.
  32. *Ibid.*, p. 25.
  33. *Ibid.*, p. 27–8.
  34. *Ibid.*, p. 34.
  35. *Ibid.*, p. 24.
  36. Ernst Krieck, *Nationalpolitische Erziehung*, 17th edn (Leipzig, 1934), p. iv.
  37. Eugen Diedrichs, 'Das Kommen des dritten Reiches', *Die Tat* 10 (December 1918), 642.
  38. *Ibid.*, p. 646.
  39. *Ibid.*, pp. 643–4.
  40. Else Stroh, 'Freideutsche Stellungnahme zur Politik', *Die Tat* 10 (March 1919), 952.
  41. *Ibid.*, p. 953.
  42. On Moeller see Gerd-Klaus Kaltenbrunner, 'Vom "Preussischen Stil" zum "Dritten Reich": Arthur Moeller van den Bruck', in Karl Schwedhelm, ed., *Propheten des Nationalismus* (Munich, 1969), pp. 139–58; Stern, *The Politics of Cultural Despair*; Hans-Joachim Schwierskott, *Arthur Moeller van den Bruck and der revolutionäre Nationalismus in der Weimarer Republik* (Göttingen, 1962).
  43. Arthur Moeller van den Bruck, *Die moderne Literatur* (Berlin, 1900–1), Vol. VII, pp. 33–4.
  44. Arthur Moeller van den Bruck, *Die Zeitgenossen* (1906), p. 202. Two other books should also be mentioned: Martin Wust, *Das dritte Reich* (Vienna, 1905); and Gerhard von Mutius, *Die drei Reiche* (Berlin, 1916). Both authors use the term Third Reich in a non-historical sense, referring to a state of mind which the individual can obtain for

himself through his own actions. The term symbolises the individual transcendence achieved through will and action, not the collective transcendence of a new stage of history.

45. See in general C.H. Bedford, 'Dmitry Merezhkovsky, the Third Testament, and the Third Humanity', *Slavonic and East European Review* 42 (1963), 144-60. Somewhat similar ideas appear in the works of Nicolas Berdyaev.
46. Dmitry Merezhkovsky, *The Menace of the Mob* (New York, 1921), p. 47.
47. *Ibid.*, pp. 83-4.
48. D. Merezhkovsky, Z. Hippius and Dm. Philosophoff, *Le Tsar et la révolution* (Paris, 1970), p. 160.
49. Dmitry Merezhkovsky, 'Die religiöse Revolution', in Dostojewski, *Politische Schriften* (Munich, 1922), p. xliv.
50. Stern, *The Politics of Cultural Despair*, p. 249.
51. Schwierskott, *Arthur Moeller van den Bruck*, p. 105.
52. Arthur Moeller van den Bruck, *Germany's Third Empire*, trans. E.O. Lorimer (New York, 1971), p. 250. I have used the wording of this translation except to substitute *Reich* for 'Empire'. The translation 'Third Empire' was acceptable when originally done in 1934 but sounds strange now that the phrase 'Third Reich' is so familiar.
53. *Ibid.*, p. 71.
54. *Ibid.*, pp. 112-14.
55. *Ibid.*, p. 242.
56. *Ibid.*, p. 15.
57. *Ibid.*, p. 13 .
58. *Ibid.*, p. 14.
59. *Ibid.*
60. *Ibid.*, p. 263.
61. *Ibid.*
62. *Ibid.*, p. 261.
63. Rhodes, *The Hitler Movement*, pp. 19, 54.