

“FORMS OF TOTALITARIANISM AND DICTATORSHIP”

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FASCISM AND THE ITALIAN ROAD TO TOTALITARIANISM

The Century of Totalitarianism

The twentieth century was the time of totalitarian regimes. For over sixty years, historians, social scientists, philosophers, theologians have examined the nature of totalitarianism and the effects it has had on the history of humanity. However, as often happens when theoretical problems collide with the meaning of human existence, the problems sparked by the debate on totalitarianism are more numerous than the answers given by the experts. There are conflicting opinions even in regards to the definition of totalitarianism, as well as in the application of this definition to political movements and regimes of the 1900's and earlier centuries, starting from the French Revolution. For example, there are those who refuse to identify Communism, Fascism, and National Socialism as totalitarian, and those who support the historical validity of this identification. There are those who believe that the totalitarian theory has a scientific value and those who believe it is only a residue of the anti-soviet propaganda of the Cold War.

Not few misunderstandings on the historical interpretation of phenomena such as Fascism, Communism, and National Socialism have resulted from the issue of totalitarianism. The major objections to the validity of totalitarian theories, stem from the doubt of the legitimacy of adopting a single theoretical model to define such profoundly different historical experiences, favoring similarities and analogies in action procedures, mentality, behavior and organization and in political power. In my opinion, the use of the category «totalitarianism» in this sense is not acceptable, provided that the historian's task is to establish, before any comparative analysis, what is specific and distinctive in the phenomena of the past. Communism, fascism, nazism are historical phenomena with specific individualities. And not only because of the obvious difference in historical traditions, social conditions, political

situations of the countries in which these phenomena took place, or because of the diversity of the social classes that supported them most during their formation, their attainment of power and the politics of the regime, but also because of the substantial difference of their ideologies, of their revolutionary myths, of their political systems that were, in turn, conditioned by the specific historical realities in which these phenomena matured.

The interpretation of fascist totalitarianism, that I am proposing, denies any theory that leads to the identification between communism, fascism and national socialism, underestimating the substantial differences between totalitarian phenomena. Moreover, I do not think it is historically accurate to elaborate a theory of totalitarianism by principally referring to the analysis of the regime. I consider it a reductive procedure, because it fractions a particular realm of the totalitarian phenomenon – the institutional realm – giving a static image of totalitarianism, in contrast with its typically dynamic nature.

There are legitimate doubts on the possibility of reaching a conclusion in the debate on totalitarianism through the definition of a theory that earns the general consent of the experts. This doubt, however, does not imply a statement of uselessness towards the issue per se. On the contrary, I believe that the problem of totalitarianism is fundamental to comprehend the history of the twentieth century. However, my point of view differs from the one that prevails among experts, especially in regards to the definition of fascism as a totalitarian phenomenon. Such definition acquires special significance in the context of an analysis of fascism aimed at targeting its nature, both as an Italian and international phenomenon, also in order to estimate its presence in contemporary history avoiding, however, an elastic use of the concept of “generic fascism” to the point of depriving it of its essential historical authenticity, which defines its origins and nature.

When we consider the nature and the meaning of fascism and the risks of liberal democracy we cannot underestimate the fact that, in this century’s history, fascism has been:

- a) The first nationalist and revolutionary mass movement born in a liberal European democracy that has introduced, in the organization of the masses and in the political competition, the *militarization* and the *sacralization* of politics, with the creation of a new kind of party, the militia party, which operates in political struggles with warly methods and considers political adversaries as «internal enemies» of the country that must be defeated and destroyed;

- b) The first political nationalist movement of the century that has brought to power the pre-eminence of the mythical thought, officially sanctioning it as superior form of political expression of the masses, establishing the sacralization of politics in the form of a political religion and a collective liturgy, “the cult of the littorio”.

It is also appropriate to remember that the fascist party, before attaining political power, displayed through its ideology but mostly through its lifestyle – with its warly methods as well as with its rites and myths – an explicit totalitarian calling, that is the aspiration of acquiring the monopoly of political power with the clear purpose of destroying the liberal State and carrying out an unprecedented project for the organization of society and State.

The Totalitarian Experiment

The term ‘totalitarianism’ can be taken as meaning:

an *experiment in political domination* undertaken by a *revolutionary movement*, with an *integralist conception* of politics, that aspires toward a *monopoly of power* and that, after having secured power, whether by legal or illegal means, destroys or transforms the previous regime and constructs a new state, based on a *single party-regime*, with the chief objective of *conquering society*. That is it seeks the subordination, integration and homogenisation of the governed, on the basis of the *integral politicisation of existence*, whether collective or individual, interpreted according to the categories, the myths and the values of a *palingenetic ideology*, institutionalised in the form of a *political religion*, that aims to shape the individual and the masses through an *anthropological revolution*, in order to regenerate the human being and create the *new man*, dedicated in body and soul to the realisation of the revolutionary and imperialistic policies of the totalitarian party. The ultimate goal is to create a *new civilisation* along expansionist and supranational lines.

The chief instruments of this experiment are:

- a) *coercion*, imposed through violence. Repression and terror are considered as legitimate instruments for the affirmation, defence and diffusion of the prevailing ideology and political system;

- b) *demagoguery* exerted through constant and all pervasive propaganda, the mobilisation of enthusiasm, the liturgical celebration of the cult of the party and the leader;
- c) *capillary organisation of the masses*, that involves men and women of all ages, in order to carry out the conquest of society and a collective indoctrination;
- d) *totalitarian pedagogy*, carried out at high level, and according to male and female role models developed along the principles and values of a palingenetic ideology;
- e) *discrimination against the outsider*, undertaken by way of coercive measures, that range from exile from public life to physical elimination of all human beings who, because of their ideas, social conditions and ethnic background are considered *inevitable enemies*, because they are regarded as undesirable by the society of the elect and, duly, incompatible with the objectives of the totalitarian experiment.

By defining totalitarianism as an *experiment*, rather than as a *regime*, it is intended to highlight the interconnections between its fundamental constituent parts, and to emphasise that totalitarianism is a *continual process*, that cannot be considered complete at any stage in its evolution. The essence of totalitarianism is to be found in the dynamic of these constituent parts and in their interconnectedness. By this, I intend to stress the formation and enactment of totalitarian dominance, to keep in mind the dialectics of the movement-regime, to give due importance to the specific ideological, organizational, institutional characteristics of the different totalitarian movements-regimes. As a matter of fact, the totalitarian regime is a laboratory built on the movement – the single revolutionary party – to mold the individual and the masses, experimenting on their lives, on their social relationships, on their conscience and even on their bodies, the formulas to create the “new man” and the “new order”. The totalitarian regime has, among its major goals, an anthropologic revolution: for this reason the totalitarian experimentation on society, on the State and especially on the human being can never be considered complete. Therefore, the totalitarian experiment is characterized by the myth of permanent revolution: the totalitarian regime considers itself to be in a continuous state of tension and struggle against everything that, inside society and the totalitarian political system itself, with the passing of time can become an obstacle to the realization of its

palingenetic ideology. By nature, totalitarian integration of the masses in the regime, through the single party, is an interminable process. The totalitarian regime is a human laboratory; it can never close down for having completed its task. Integrating society in the State, molding the individual and the masses, is an experiment that can never come to an end, if for no other reason than because it has to deal with the unstoppable substitution of generations and of the ruling class and the confrontation with the international situation.

At the point of origin of the totalitarian experiment is the revolutionary party, the principal author and protagonist, organised along militaristic and autocratic lines, with an integralist conception of politics. The party does not permit the existence of other political parties with other ideologies, and conceives of the State, even after it has exalted its primacy, as the means of achieving its policy of expansionism, as well as its ideas for a new society. In other words, the totalitarian party, from its very early beginnings, possesses a complex system of beliefs, dogmas, myths, rituals and symbols that define the meaning and purpose of collective existence within this world, while also defining good and evil exclusively in accordance with the principles, values and objectives of the party, which it helps implement.

The analysis of the original nature of the totalitarian party, of its ideology, of its organization, of its political style, is a preliminary and fundamental condition for the definition of totalitarianism. «The regimes – Raymond Aron has correctly observed – didn't become totalitarian by progressively slipping onto totalitarian land, but with the thrust of their original intention, that is the will of basically transforming the existing order for an ideology» .

Fascism and Totalitarianism

The majority of experts that have worked on formulating a theory on totalitarianism, drawing out its constitutive elements almost exclusively from the historical experience of stalinism and national socialism, believe that fascism cannot be considered a totalitarian regime, even though Mussolini and the fascists considered themselves to be the creators of the totalitarian State. Even though it seems that fascism was not the creator of the term “totalitarian” it most definitely was the only political regime, among those later considered to be totalitarian, that proudly adopted this word to define its political view and power structure. Moreover, among the totalitarian regimes of the twentieth century, the Fascist regime was the only one to formally adopt the definition of totalitarian State. Antifascism, from the mid-Twenties on,

used the term “totalitarian”, and all its derivations, to define the newness and originality of the fascist regime. Democratic antifascists, like Giovanni Amendola and Luigi Sturzo, were the ones that, on the basis of the Italian experience and of the comparison between fascist and communist regimes, formulated the first elements of an analysis of totalitarianism that will later be largely resumed by the theories on totalitarianism, elaborated after World War II.

After the fall of fascism, we actually witnessed a “de-totalitarization” of fascism, which was reduced, in totalitarian theories, to a kind of authoritarian regime or even to a personal dictatorship, a mussolinism. Other experts defined fascism as a «totalitarian-oriented» regime, or as an «imperfect totalitarianism», as «incomplete totalitarianism». The theory of a non-totalitarian fascism has prevailed for a long time, even among historians. Most of them simply adopted the models of totalitarianism supplied by social science, without bothering to ascertain their validity through confrontation with the actual research results, more and more numerous in these years, and above all able to largely modify the image of fascism, which had led many experts to exclude it from totalitarian phenomena. They reduce fascism to a “mussolinism” or consider the party of the fascist regime a passive instrument in the hands of the Duce, lacking power and a political role, like a huge but inert bureaucratic apparatus assigned only to the organization of parades. In the last few years, a new side of the problem of fascist totalitarianism has arisen, by enlarging the range of research on fascism to areas long remained unexplored by historians, such as ideology, the party, the regime, the system of rites and symbols of fascism intended as a political religion. I must refer to these studies for the development of the reasoning and the documentation that back up my interpretation.

Actually, fascism was not a creation of Mussolini alone. It was a mass movement, born from the experience of the Great War, from the antisocialist reaction of the middle classes; it had its own ideology, and it acquired its own autonomy as a new organized political force. As a social expression mostly of the middle classes, new to politics, fascism proposed not only the defense of economical and social assets based on private property against the threat of a Socialist revolution, but it aimed at carrying out its own political and cultural revolution, through the destruction of the liberal regime and the construction of a new State, conceived as an unprecedented kind of totalitarian organization of the civilized society and political system. In the fascist regime as well, a «will to basically change the existing order through an ideology» was present,

even though the process of transformation followed different paths, rhythms, and time frames compared to other totalitarian phenomena of the time.

Indicative definition of Fascism

Totalitarianism, I believe, is the fundamental and essential element to define fascism, for the construction of an “ideal type” that may be a useful instrument for the conceptual organization of historiographic research data. The “ideal type”, in the sense intended by Max Weber, is without doubt a useful means to orient historical research and to conceptually organize its results, but only on condition of not losing sight of the instrumental and artificial character of such constructions, avoiding giving them the substantiality of a historical phenomenon. The warning left by Weber himself, must always be kept in mind, while building an “ideal type”: he pointed out that nothing is «in any case, more dangerous than a mix of theory and history, deriving from naturalistic prejudices, either you believe you have secured the “proper” contents, the “essence” of historical reality in those conceptual summaries, or if you use them instead as a series of Procuste into which history must be squeezed, or if you hypostasize “ideas” as an “actual” reality that exists behind the flux of phenomena, as real “forces” that reveal themselves in history».

For the construction of an “ideal type” of fascism as a totalitarian movement-regime, I kept in mind the correlation between the organizational dimension of the movement and of the party, the cultural dimension of the ideology, of the myths, of the symbols and the institutional dimension of the regime and of the State:

a) *Organizational realm:*

1. a mass movement, with interclass aggregation but in which, in the military and directional cadres, young middle class generation new to political activity are organized in
2. a militia party, that bases its identity not on social hierarchy and class origin but on sense of comradeship and which invests itself with a mission of national regeneration and considers itself to be in state of war against political adversaries and aims at acquiring
3. the monopoly of political power, using terror, parliamentary tactics and the compromise with the leading class to create a new regime, destroying parliamentary democracy;

b) Cultural realm:

1. an anti-ideological and pragmatic ideology that proclaims to be antimaterialist, antiindividualist, antiliberal, antidemocratic, antimarxist, tendentially populist and anticapitalistic, expressed more esthetically than theoretically through a new political style and through myths, rites and symbols of a lay religion, established to favor the process of acculturation, socialization and fideistic integration of the masses in order to create a “new man”.
2. a culture based on the mythical thought and on the tragic and activistic sense of life, seen as manifestation of the will power, as the myth of youth creator of history, as warly model of life and collective organization;
3. a totalitarian view of the primacy of politics, as integral experience and continuous revolution, to enact through the fascist State, the fusion of the individual and of the masses in the organic and mystic union of the nation, as racial and moral community, adopting measures of discrimination and persecution against those considered outsiders of this community, because enemies of the regime or because they belong to races considered either inferior or dangerous for the safety of the Nation;
4. a civil ethics based on the absolute subordination of the citizen to the State, on the total dedication of the individual to the national community, to discipline, to virility, to comradeship, to warly spirit;

c) Institutional realm:

1. a single party which covers the function of organ of the “continuous revolution”, of providing for the armed defense of the regime, of choosing the directive cadres and of organizing the masses in the totalitarian State, making them part of a process, both emotional and fideistic, of permanent mobilization;
2. a police apparatus, which prevents controls and suppresses, even appealing to terroristic measure, dissention, and opposition;
3. a political system ordered in a hierarchy of functions, nominated from above and dominated by the figure of the “capo”, invested with charismatic

- sacrality, who commands, directs, and coordinates the actions of the party, the regime, and the State;
4. a corporate organization of the economy, which eliminates union liberty, enlarges the spheres of intervention of the State and aims at achieving, on the basis of technocratic and solidarity principles, the collaboration of the productive classes under the control of the regime, in order to reach its goal of power while preserving private property and class division;
 5. an imperialist foreign policy inspired by the myth of national grandeur and of the New Civilization, aiming at supranational expansion.

Ideology and history

Clearly, in the elaboration of this definition of fascism I followed a different procedure than the experts' who, in their definition, privilege the ideological element, separating ideology from historical reality in the movement-regime. I do not agree with this approach because I think that a definition of fascism cannot be elaborated separating fascism-ideology from fascism-party and from fascism-regime, believing that the conceptual essence may be contained in a sort of "pure" ideology, existing before the actual birth of a fascist movement. Following this approach, everything that, even in the ideological elaboration, was produced by the life experience of the Party and of the regime is left out of the definition. The experience of squadristism, the organization of the militia party, the symbols and the rites of the sacralization of politics, the institutions of the totalitarian State are all elements that contribute to the formation of the fascist ideology itself and they become an essential part of it. I believe the connection between experience and ideology is particularly important in fascism, which maintained from its birth the characteristic of antiideological-ideology, an ideology, in other words, which asserted the predominance of action and experience over the theoretical systems of rational ideologies.

Of course, fascism did not rise out of nothing and did not evolve by feeding on its ideology alone. Important elements of the fascist ideology, culture and political style are traceable in different preexisting, both right and left wing, politics: in the inheritance of Jacobin nationalism, in the myths and secular liturgies of the mass movements of the nineteenth century, in neoromanticism, irrationalism, spiritualism and voluntarism of the various philosophies of life, in the activism and antiparlamentarism of the new radical antiliberal

movements of the new right and left wing revolutionaries, which operated in Italy and in Europe before the break out of the Great War. But the connections between fascist ideology and the intellectual and political movements in the years prior to the Great War don't justify, however, the definition of these movements, their ideology and their culture as manifestations of "protofascism" or even of "fascism before fascism", because ideas and myths of these same movements merged into ideological compendiums of cultural and political movements which weren't fascist or were definitely antifascist. The concept of "protofascism" is strengthened by a backward reading of history to foreshadow, through a retrospective projection, the inevitable political result of certain ideological currents. But one thing is to study the cultural and ideological context of Italy before the Great War and the birth of fascism to locate the factors which prepared a favorable environment for fascist ideology, another is to define that same context as "fascist", and consider fascism itself an inevitable consequence to it.

Fascist totalitarianism

Italian fascism, as an ideology, as a party and as a regime was the first manifestation of a new revolutionary and totalitarian, mystic and palingenetic nationalism, by which other right wing movements and regimes born in Europe between the wars were inspired, each of these adapting the fascist model, in part or in whole, to their national specifics. Fascism, according to Roger Griffin's definition of "generic fascism", is a form of paligenetic ultranationalism, which has appropriated itself with the myth of revolution, conceived, above all, as spiritual and anthropological revolution aimed at transforming with institutions and society, the human character, the style and way of life. Fascism assumes the idea of revolution as a process of continuous construction of a new political and economical system, a new system of values and life style, a new civilization.

The central nucleus of fascist ideology was the political conception intended as enactment of the will of power from a minority of activists directed to the realization of their myth, the "new civilization"; it tended to create, in society, a political group autonomous in its choices and independent from all forces that had backed and conditioned its ascent to power. Such group was imagined as a class of modern Platos that had to build an organic and dynamic State in which to raise the new fascist man.

Fascism summarized the essential traits of its ideology in the myth of the State and in activism as the ideal of life. The fascist ideology was the most complete rationalization of the totalitarian State, based on the statement of the supremacy of politics and on the resolution of the private with the public, as subordination of privacy-based values (religion, culture, morality, love etc.) to the pre-eminent political power. Deriving from this idea of the totalitarian State is the conception of private and public life as total dedication and permanent service in every activity, which the citizen must render to the fascist State for its greatness. It is based on the conception of the individual as a transient element in national collectivity.

Consequence of this idea was the subordination of individual and collective life to the absolute supremacy of the State, through a capillary organization and the permanent mobilization of the population, instruments of a mass politic based on the rational use of the irrational, through a political mythology and liturgy, which had the role to mold individual and collective conscience based on the model of a new man, robbing human beings of their individuality in order to make them cellular elements of a collective nationality, arranged through the capillary organization of the totalitarian State. Fascism understood the importance of the masses in contemporary society, but denied them the right and the means, as a “mass”, to express a political idea and to exercise self-government on the basis of the principles of equality and liberty.

On the base of cultural premises that stated the prevalence of the mythical doctrine in community life and political action, fascists assigned a fundamental role, for the enactment of the totalitarian experiment, to the institution of a political religion, giving great importance to rites and symbols to revive and maintain the consensus of the masses. Actually, we can say that the fascist State, for its properly totalitarian nature, which aimed at completely absorbing the individual in its material and moral reality, was led to assume the role of a religious institution with dogmas, rites, and symbols. For fascism, rites and symbols answered to the irrational nature of the individual and the masses and, thanks to them, it was possible to give the single and the community the sense of belonging to a superior and dominant reality, stable and eternal in the passing of time.

Fascism was a political religion, with its own set of beliefs, dogmas and which intended to define the meaning and the goal of existence, creating a new political cult centered on the sacralization of the fascist State and on the myth of the Duce, with a tight sequence of collective rites to celebrate the big

events of its “sacred history”. The major public ceremonies of fascism were organized not only to give a positive external image of the power of its movement, but to actually carry out, in every-day life, the myth of the fascist State, represented as a “moral community”, based on a common faith which united classes and generations in the “cult of the littorio”. The political cult was to be the union trait designed to maintain the prestige and the authority of the State solid and alive, to periodically revive the political faith in fascism and in its Duce. The celebration of the “sacred festivities” established by the regime was basically an aesthetic dramatization of fascist mythology, from the reevocation of roman greatness to the “new birth” of the nation through the fascist intervention, war and revolution. Even the myth of Romanity was an essential part of the fascist political religion. The myth of Rome was to be inspiration of civic virtues, of sense of State, in order to elaborate a model of new civilization.

The major artificer of the fascist totalitarian experiment was the party, which had an active and decisive role in demolishing the liberal State and constructing the fascist State. Its position in regards to the State, aside from the formal statements of subordination (that the historians have taken to literally), was everything but passive and many times influenced the decision of Mussolini himself, despite the unconditional exaltation of his image of supreme leader of the party. The role of the Duce, in fascism, cannot be considered similar to the personalization of power of authoritarian dictatorships as, for example, the Salazar’s regime or Franco’s regime, which weren’t created by a revolutionary mass movement and didn’t aim at institutionalizing such movement in a single party regime, with the principal objective of realizing the totalitarian myth through organization, integration and permanent mobilization of the masses and the creation of a “new man”. Considering the central and predominant position assumed by the Leader in the fascist political system, I believe that it is possible to define the fascist political system as *totalitarian caesarism*:

a charismatic dictatorship integrated in an institutionalized regime structure, based on the single party and on mass organization and mobilization, in continuous construction to make it consistent with the myth of the totalitarian State, consciously adopted as reference model for the organization of the political system, and actually operating as fundamental code of beliefs and behaviors imposed on both the individual and the masses.

Totalitarian Modernism

Fascism was the Italian road to totalitarianism. Fascist totalitarianism was a reality in continuous construction, that progressively shaped itself in the political culture, in the institutions and in the fascist regime's life style, through a complex relationship between ideology, party and regime which, through contrasts and contradictions shows the constant presence of a fascist totalitarian logic exuding from the ideology and political action of the Fascist movement-regime. Certainly, the fascist totalitarian experiment encountered, during its enactment, numerous obstacles in society, in the old State's apparatus, in the Church. Nevertheless, recent researches prove that it obtained also many, not insignificant successes, so that at the eve of World War II the Fascist regime was certainly more totalitarian than it had been in the early Twenties: no opposition seriously threatened, inside the State, the stability and the functioning of the totalitarian laboratory, and the resistance encountered until then had accelerated, rather than hindered, the totalitarian experiment especially in the second half of the Thirties. It must be remembered that the fall of the fascist regime was determined by the military defeat, not by the monarchy, the Church or the people's opposition.

An agreement can be reached with those who claim that fascism did not build a "perfect totalitarianism", provided that such concept have a certain scientific validity. However, it must be considered that a more accurate study of those regimes considered "completely" and "perfectly" totalitarian, reveals that in these regimes as well there were obstructions and obstacles, numerous contrasts between myth and reality, between ambitions and results. In short, all totalitarian regimes, in historical reality, are kinds of "incomplete" or "imperfect" totalitarianism, not only in respects to the various theoretical models that have been elaborated by experts, but also in respects to their totalitarian projects, to the different phases of development of the totalitarian phenomenon, from the attainment of power to the creation of the regime, and in respects to the different historical and social situations in which they took place.

As a totalitarian phenomenon, fascism is a modern phenomenon; it is a movement-regime, which is born and belongs to the historical and social environment created by modernization and it takes part in the tensions and conflicts of modern society accepting it as an irreversible, although modifiable

reality. It expects to find a solution, for such tension and conflicts, not by returning to the past or by halting the modernization process, but with the ambition of facing the challenges of modernity by jumping into the construction of the future, into the creation of a new civilization foreshadowed by its ideology.

Fascist totalitarianism was a form of political modernism intending to define, by this term, a movement which accepts modernization and believes to possess the formula able to give humanity, dragged into the vortex of modernization, «the power to change the world that is changing them, to make their own way inside that vortex and make it theirs» (M.Bermann). Fascism was a manifestation of a new kind of modernism, that I have called “modernist nationalism”, which wanted to promote these processes, subordinating them to the goal of strengthening the nation in order to have it participate, as the protagonist, to world politics. Some fascist scholars idealized the harmony of ancient times under the figures of the throne and the campanile, but the major impulse of fascism was given by the dynamic sense of existence, of the myth of the future. Fascists considered themselves, as did futurists, «builders of what’s to come». Fascism had its own view of modernity in opposition to the culture, the ideology, and the style of liberal, socialist and communist modernity and claimed for itself the pretense of imposing its own formula of modernity on the twentieth century.

To consider fascism a form of political modernism does not mean praising fascism nor denigrating modernity. Of course, if you identify modernity with the illuminist tradition and liberal civilization, the exclusion of fascism – or any other kind of totalitarianism for that matter – from modernity is automatic. Nevertheless, even if sharing the ideal of a rationalist and liberal modernity, we do not believe it coherent with a true scientific attitude to transform such an ideal in a category of historical interpretation. There are new forms of authoritarianism and irrationalism that don’t represent the remains of the premodern society at all, but that are created by the processes of modernization themselves, thus generating models of alternative or antagonist modernity in respect to the liberal rationalist model, as was the one I call “totalitarian modernity”.

After the tragic experiences of the twentieth century, it must be established that modern society was also the matrix of new forms of authoritarianism, as was totalitarianism in its different forms and levels, based on mass mobilization, on the cult of secular modern deities (nation, race, class), on the ethics of dedication of the individual to the community, on the myth of

productivity for ideological purposes. Not only did modernization not start an irreversible process of “world disenchantment”, neither did it bring, through secularization, to the disappearance of the myth and of the “sacred”, but it produced different “metamorphoses of the sacred” and new myths. The sacralization of politics, which had in fascism one of its largest manifestations, is an essentially modern phenomenon, and it implies modernization and secularization.

Modernity is an important generator of myths and political beliefs aimed at the construction of the future. I believe that fascism, in its proper and essential traits as a form of totalitarian modernism, belongs to a completely surpassed historical situation. This does not mean, however, that rational and liberal modernity can definitely celebrate victory. The history of the twentieth century leads us to realistically understand that irrationality and modernity, authoritarianism and modernity, are not at all incompatible but can coexist and may generate, in unheard of forms, new threats to rational and liberal democracy.