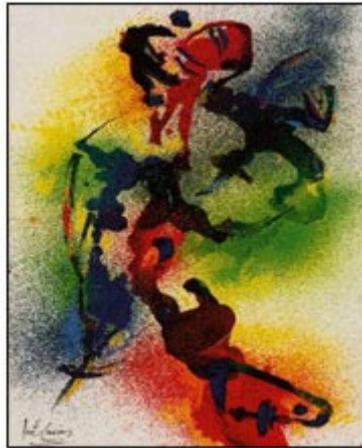


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*The People of God and Their Holy War:
Globalisation in Historical Context*

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by

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Hubris must be put out, more than fire
- Heraclitus

Introduction: the fate of books

It is no doubt one of the most ironic aspects of the academic life of the past decades, even the entire last century or so, that while the principle of 'publish or perish' rules unchallenged, much of the most challenging and influential ideas of social thought and philosophy are due to posthumous publications. The trend-setter probably in this regard as well is Nietzsche, with his *Nachlass* and the controversies surrounding the *Will to Power*; but – especially in a sociological conference – one should add immediately that *Economy and Society* was also unpublished, and up to our days there is still controversy even concerning its proper title, not to mention Weber's possible intentions concerning eventual publication. We can continue the line with Husserl, Heidegger, or Wittgenstein; closer to the present, one can allude to the controversies and anticipations surrounding the publication of Foucault's *Collège de France* lectures.

This might help to explain that concerning the theme of my paper, I have to start with a particularly strange posthumous piece, Eric Voegelin's essay on the 'People of God'. Voegelin wrote the first version of this essay around 1940-41, as part of his on-going project on the 'History of Political Ideas', and was considered by him as the key of

the entire undertaking.¹ He sent the essay for publication to Leo Strauss, then one of the editors of *Social Research*. Strauss, however, for reasons that seem far from being convincing, refused publication.² This refusal was arguably a crucial event, or rather non-event, in the social thought of the past century, as the ideas contained there, with the attempt to trace the 'spirit' of totalitarian ideologies of the 20th century to medieval apocalyptic sectarian origins could have had a comparable effect, in the field of political theory, to Weber's essays of the spirit of capitalism in social and economic theory, advancing, and arguably surpassing, the similar efforts of Hannah Arendt, Jacob Talmon or Norman Cohn, published at least a decade later. Voegelin's work, however, went way beyond the genesis of totalitarianism, as it was the first serious attempt to take up and continue the project of the Nietzschean Weber, complementing the latter's genealogy of 'inner-worldly asceticism' and its impact on the rise of capitalism with the study of 'inner-worldly eschatology' and its impact on the nation-state, including its expansionist and totalitarian tendencies. The lack of publication not only postponed, and in certain a way arguably side-tracked and compromised the reception of Voegelin's ideas, but contributed to the fact that his 'History of Political Ideas', which eventually grew into a manuscript of 4500 pages, remained unpublished until 1997, and still failed to make the impact it should – and was bound to – have.³

This paper intends to be a belated tribute to Voegelin's insights concerning the significance of the 'People of God' motive on world history and modernity. I need to add that is more a work on progress than a full presentation of research findings, though drawing support from published work and other conference papers.⁴ The central thesis of the paper is that the 'people of god' motive represents a crucial link between the first global age, the age of world-conquering empires, and the current global age, thus helping to better understand the dynamics of the present. Thus, while Voegelin's

¹ For details, see Szakolczai (2001).

² See Embersley and Cooper (1993).

³ Voegelin's later fame was largely due to the thesis according which modernity is a 'Gnostic' age (see Voegelin 1952), developed on the basis of the re-working of the 'People of God' chapter in 1948-49.

⁴ See Szakolczai (2003).

original work drew its inspiration of the context, the multiple 'liminal' situation of having been written during W.W.II. by a refugee, this only increases its relevance for the current situation, the emerging, new type of 'terrorist wars' of the new global age.⁵

The emergence of the 'people of god' motive

The singular idea that there is a 'chosen people' of god arose in Ancient Judaism (or, rather, was formative of it). In fact, as Henri Frankfort argued in his classic and path-breaking work, this was the 'one permanent' and 'most significant' feature of this religion (Frankfort 1948: 339). In order to make a proper sense of this idea, we need to analyse the conditions out of which it came into being.⁶

The idea was rooted in the first recorded personal transcendental experience in the history of mankind, the experience of Abraham, this individual who – in the emphatic reconstruction of Thomas Mann in *Joseph and his Brothers* – started a search out for god, and which became the source of monotheism and ethical prophecy, breaking the power of sacrificial priestly religion.⁷ This experience, however, came in a highly specific, and in more ways than one liminal context: the experience of wandering for decades in the desert, alone with a beautiful but childless wife, in search for a home, a family, and a secure future. It should not be surprising therefore that, when the experience overtook Abraham, it was interpreted in the form of a particularistic, tribal dream: the divine promise of numerous offspring and a rule over the world.

Whatever doubts one may have about the genuineness of story, it has its very real consequences, as it led to the attempts to conquer the 'promised land', arguably the first 'holy war' in history, and the effects of this are still visible in our present. Furthermore, the mythical tradition built around this experience connects Mesopotamia and Egypt,

⁵ On liminality, see Victor Turner.

⁶ This section draws on Voegelin (1956), using the methodological considerations of Szakolczai (1998, 2000a, 2003).

⁷ On the contrast between sacrificial and prophetic religions, see the works of René Girard.

the two main Empires of the times, as the negative antipodes of Judaism, thus identifies the new religion both at an in-between, or liminal level, and as the denial of the complex of centralised state and organised sacrificial religion.

The first global age

The first global age was the age of the first empires that effectively searched for the conquest of the entire inhabited planet. This effort started with the Neo-Assyrian Empire of the 8-7th centuries BC, and carried to fruition to some extent by the Persian and the Macedonian, and finally the Roman Empires.

World-conquest and empire-building evoked resistance, both by political-military means, and at the level of thought: as a diagnosis of the impulses, and as a search for a way out. It is in this manner that the surprising events of the 'axial age', the astonishing synchronicity of the emergence of many of the most important spiritual, philosophical and religious movements can be rendered intelligible.⁸ Among the various attempts, the two most important were Hebrew prophecy and Greek philosophy, emerging exactly at the most marginal and liminal regions of the rising empires, in Palestina (the Western coastline of the Middle East, the passage towards Europe) and Ionia (the Western coastline of Asia Minor, the passage towards Egypt).

With its deep-seated hostility to large, alienated, centralised states, ancient Judaism offered particularly strong resistance to the new age of ecumenic empires, at least at the spiritual-mental level. As Max Weber emphasised it, in Israel, and in Israel only, prophets could have risen who successfully contradicted kings, and even humiliated them, at the very heart of their courts. The potential relevance of system of thought and spirituality, however, was cut short by the persisting tribalistic vision of the 'chosen people'; a conflict that became particularly acute in the controversies surrounding – up to our days – the prophecies of the 'second Isaiah', especially its

⁸ On axial age, see Jaspers (1953), Eisenstadt (1986), and Assmann (2001).

potentially universalistic message, pronounced around the time of the conquest of Babylon by Cyrus, thus the rise of the first truly global empire.

The return of the tribal dream

The first universalistic religion, that furthermore managed to resist successfully – in a sociological sense – the forces underlying the first global age, and had the strength to mastermind a renewal out of its ashes, was Christianity, which grew out of Judaism, and exactly through the abandonment of the tribal dream of the ‘chosen people’. This dream, however, gained a new life with the rise of Islam. The emergence of this new religion can again be rooted in another liminal time and place. A liminal, in between time period, the collapse of the Western Roman empire, and a weakening of its Eastern survival; and a liminal place, the Arabian desert, the last and only remaining ‘frontier’ area in the vast region comprising the Near East, Northern Africa and South-Eastern Europe.⁹ The return of this tribal dream, the reassertion, in a new form, of the ‘chosen people’ motive was the central force that managed to unite and mobilise, with astonishing success, the last remaining tribal, quasi pre-historical people of the region.

Islam, as it is well-known, grew out of a mixture of Judaism and Christianity. It is not accidental, however, which elements of these two religions were mixed, and how. As a full analysis of this complicated issue is beyond the reach of this paper, we’ll focus only on the sociological question of the identity formation mechanisms involved. Out of the two religions, and with an unfailing sense of judgment, Mohammed selected those elements that inciting the moving forces of a primitive, tribal people – but also that seem easily the least acceptable from these two religions: the tribal promise of the chosen people from Judaism, with the exclusiveness of the single book and the single, all-powerful god; and the promise of individual salvation in the Paradise from Christianity, of course modified to suit the taste of the Bedouin warriors.

⁹ Here I draw on the works of Henri Pirenne.

The genius of Mohammed lay in the way he managed to infuse the combination with a spirit of universality. An exclusively tribal dream would have prevented universal appeal, while mere fancies about life in a paradise would not have carried beyond the various Eastern salvation religions and sects. Mohammed, however, managed to come up with a powerful combination of the two using the mechanisms of identity formation. The Koran starts with a monotonous but extremely powerful hammering of the difference between the faithful and the infidel, playing the Goffmanian game of labelling and stigmatisation. The religion of the all-powerful Allah was to be carried originally by the Arabic tribes, but whoever joined the side of the faithful could have participated in the promise of paradise. It was through this 'magic' of identity creation that Mohammed managed to build up and motivate one of the most powerful campaigns of conquests in military history; and certainly the most successful in so far as prophetic religions are concerned. These conquests reasserted, in the form of a 'holy war', the ancient Hebraic idea of the conquest of the promised land.

The consequence of this combination, however, was that the Islam, in opposition to Christianity, did not need to rely upon the 'care of the self' (Foucault 1986) or the 'civilising process' (Elias 2000) in reinforcing the identity, but also in shaping and perfecting the conduct of life of its adherents. Even though, again in opposition to Christianity, it inherited the most highly developed regions of the ancient world, and even tolerated certain forms of knowledge and erudition – as it could not care less -, it did not animate and stimulate these forms, which eventually decayed. While North of the Mediterranean the Irish and Anglo-Saxon missionary monks carried the torch of the civilising process, in the South the militarised Arabic clans ignited the spirit of the holy war.¹⁰

¹⁰ As a complement to the Pirenne thesis, see Borkeu (1981), where Borkeu took further up the project of his friend, Norbert Elias, concerning the origins of the civilising process (for details, see Szokolczai 2000b). In fact, not Mohamed and Charlemagne, rather St. Columbanus (died 615) and Mohamed (died 632) were exact contemporaries.

The Crusades

The Crusades are one of the clearest test cases to judge the relative merits of the structuralist-Marxist history and the genealogical method emphasising the formative impact of events. According to the former perspective, the Crusades are simply episodes of medieval history, manifesting the – rather despicable – spirit of the times, with no interest on their own, and can simply be explained by the need of the aristocracy to find occupation for their offspring.¹¹ From the perspective of an event-based approach, however, one can reconstruct the crucial formative aspect of the Crusades. According to this, the Crusades did not ‘manifest’ the ‘essence’ of the medieval spirit; rather, it was exactly this peculiar ‘spirit’ that grew out of the peculiar event of the Crusades and the mentalities that surrounded it.

The Crusades grew, through and through, out of an encounter with Islam. It was hostilities with the Islam – more specifically, the rise of a new carrier of the spirit of conquest, the Seldjuk Turks, and their closing of the major pilgrimages routes that sparked the call for the first Crusade. But, more indirectly, these were the contacts with the Islam, and the related familiarisation with the idea of a ‘holy war’, that facilitated the emergence of a new, Christian idea of a ‘holy war’.

This was facilitated by developments in Europe; most importantly, the last wave of Germanic invasions, the arrival of the Vikings or Normans, with all the associated problems of conversion and pacification. The battle of Hastings took place less than three decades before the first Crusade, the Norman conquest of Sicily was practically contemporaneous, while the Norman conquest of Ireland happened in the second part of the 12th century. Finally, it might also be of some significance that the pope launching the first Crusade, Urban the second was the first Norman pope.

A crucial element in the liminal context of the preaching of the first Crusade was the ‘Peace of God’ movement. This was an effort by the Church to limit the devastating

¹¹ Unfortunately, here even Elias subsumes to such a simplistic reasoning.

impact of endemic fighting and warfare. The original idea was to prohibit armed fights on Sunday, the day of the Lord; but gradually, incorporating among others Friday fasting, it extended from Thursday afternoon to Monday morning, thus significantly curtailing the favourite activities of the warlords and potentates of the times.

This was the general context, liminal in multiple regards, as much psychological and spiritual as socio-political,¹² in which pope Urban preached the First Crusade, in November 1095. The effect was overwhelming, well beyond anything the pope even imagined. His idea was only to ask some help to defend the pilgrims on their way to the Holy Land. The resounding impact was due to the fact that for the first time the Church did not preach the restriction and repression of the powerful belligerent impulses, but offered a possibility for a proper Christian way of warfare. In this way the conflict between the identity of a good Christian – a very powerful concern at the time – and a good warrior knight was eliminated.

The consequences of this truly liminal discharge, recalling the 'Great Thunderstorm' of Thomas Mann's *Magic Mountain*, were enormous. The events completely reshaped Christianity, leading to a novel combination of missionary and military zeal. It led to the rise of the new kind of warrior orders, whose members were monks and knights at the same time: "a strange and bewildering breed, meeker than lambs, fiercer than lions" (Bernard of Clairvaux, c.1128, quoted in Seward 1995: 267). These three orders, the Templars, Teutonic Knights and the Order of St Lazarus each had a major impact on the history of Europe;¹³ The mobilisation for the first Crusade also gave rise to the first anti-Semitic pogroms. The extremely violent scenes that surrounded the military actions of the Crusades were also unprecedented, and could only be explained by a fatal suspension of the Christian civilising process. Thus, in one word, one could argue that the Crusades were a major instance of the islamisation of

¹² This is singled out for attention by Dupront in his 'magnum opus', who emphasised the 'extraordinary' character of the Crusades (pp.1279-80), including the paradox of its longevity on the one hand, but its 'extra-temporal' character on the other (pp.1280-82).

¹³ The 'Lazar houses', to which Foucault traces the roots of the modern asylums, were first set up by a Crusading order.

early medieval European society. Paradoxically, but not uniquely, the fight against Islam to some extent shaped medieval Europe to the image of the 'enemy'.¹⁴

These effects were carried over to the next period of European history, the period of the great discoveries, or the European expansion. As historians argue, this expansion can be considered as the 'secularisation' of the medieval expansionism characteristic of the Crusades. Indeed, there is a remarkable temporal and spatial coincidence. The rise of the age of discoveries coincides with the waning of the Crusading efforts; while the driving power of the first period of European expansionism was Spain, a country quite peripheral to medieval Europe, but closest to Islam. In fact, in this respect, the events of 1492 possesses symbolic value: this was the year when Columbus discovered America; but also the year in which Granada, the last Arabic stronghold was conquered by the Spanish; and it was also the year in which – as an intensification of the Inquisition – the Jews were expelled from Spain.

Britain: The Theme of Albion and Jerusalem

The manner in which the lead in the European expansion (and in national state building in general) was taken over from the Spanish by the British can be compared to the way in which the driving force of the rise of modern capitalism moved from Renaissance Italy to the Protestant North. In both cases the efforts of the southern countries can be described in terms of 'secularisation'. This, however, failed to provide a proper, widespread popular mobilisation, a 'living spirit' for the efforts and forces of political and economic growth. This break-through only came with the rise of Protestantism. In the transition period of the late 16th and early 17th centuries a crucial role was played by the Netherlands, this small and marginal, but in many respects also highly liminal

¹⁴ To give only one particularly relevant example from Dupront's book, the 'holy war' and 'salvation' are two of the four main themes in which he is thematising the 'metaphysics' of the Crusades (1997: 1384-1422), with the words 'holy war' and 'salvation' being practically the only terms used in the entire Table of Contents.

area, situated at that time – in joint political and geographic terms – exactly ‘in between’ Spain and Britain. The great force of Britain lay in the fact that it managed to combine successfully and thus providing the cutting edge both at the level of political-military conquests and expansions and the rise of the Weberian, ‘sober-bourgeois’ capitalism; and even the growth of modern science.

This happened, however, not simply due to a spiritual reinvigoration derived from the Reformation, but also the re-launching of the idea of the ‘people of god’. In substantiating this point, only one author will be referred to, with a special focus on only one of his books. The author is Frances Yates, a unique and imposing figure among contemporary historians of thought. In a series of path-breaking works, with titles challenging centuries of received wisdom (like *Giordano Bruno and the Hermetic Tradition* or *The Rosicrucian Enlightenment*), establishing direct links between the champions of the scientific method and obscure Renaissance magi, Yates practically re-wrote our self-understanding concerning the rise of the enterprise of modern science. The book is her last full monograph, *The Occult Philosophy in the Elizabethan Age*, written in her late 70s, and could be rightly considered as the synthesis of her life-work. The significance of this work, especially for this paper, lies in the links established between the various threads of occult philosophy and the ideology of Elizabethan and then Puritan British expansionism.

The idea emphasising the millenarian aspects of Puritanism, including the Miltonian resurrection of the idea of the ‘chosen people’ for the English, and the direct impact on secular developments like the rise of capitalism or British empire-building is of course not new.¹⁵ Yates, however, clarified and deepened this idea in three important points. First, she reconstructed a long historical tradition of which ‘Puritan Occultism’ (Yates 1979: 177, 181) was only the culminating point. Second, she has demonstrated that much of the ideas usually associated with the ‘glorious revolution’ of the 1640s can be traced back to the Elizabethan Age. Finally, at the end of her life-work she ventured

¹⁵ This was already central to the classic work of Tawney; see also Hill (1977).

to risk some statements concerning parallels between British Puritanism and the Jewish Messianism.

The Occult tradition and its legacy

The conventional view identifies the Renaissance as a period of secularisation, the weakening of the Christian-religious impulse, to be followed by an upsurge of religiosity and spirituality the Reformation and the counter-Reformation. An important modification in this view was the recognition of the importance of the re-discovery of Plato in the Renaissance, stimulated by the fall of Constantinople in 1453 and the migration of scholars and books toward the West, and the subsequent rise of renaissance Neoplatonism, as championed for e.g. by Kristeller. Yates, however, makes a further step by carefully identifying a series of other forgotten traditions behind, and for long alternative to, Neoplatonism and the Reformation.

This was first of all the Hermetic-alchemical tradition, contained in the works Hermes Trismegistos, assumed to be an old Egyptian sage, thus the possessor of a kind of wisdom more ancient even than the Mosaic Laws. Florentine Neoplatonists like Marsilio Ficino or Pico della Mirandola not only attempted to combine Christianity with Plato, but also with the Hermetic tradition. Giordano Bruno, argues Yates (1964), was not simply a champion of Copernicus and forerunner of modern science, but also a belated protagonist in this very effort, with the important difference of considering Hermes Trismegistos as being more ancient, *thus* containing more important wisdom than the Old or New Testaments and the Greek philosophers, ceasing to be Christian.

Just as important a thread could be found, however, in the work of the 13th century Catalan mystic Ramon Lull (1232-c.1316). When working on a translation of Bruno's writings, Yates discovered that Bruno could not be made sense of without an in-depth understanding of Lull's writings. As she eventually came to realise, Lull was 'an extremely important figure', his work being 'a precursor of scientific method' (Yates

1979: 13), at the origin of 'constant search for method' characteristic of European thought since the 17th century (Yates 1982: 7). Both Bacon and Descartes deeply drew on his works, so much so that 'it is not an exaggeration to say that the European search for method, the root of European achievement, began with Ramon Lull' (Ibid.).

Yates gives considerable emphasis to the fact that the pioneering work of Lull emerged out of the in-between or liminal context of medieval Spain, 'taking advantage of the unique concentration of Christian, Moslem, and Jewish traditions in his world' (Yates 1979: 13). She even claims that the growth of Spanish power in the late 15th century, based on the unified kingdom of Aragon and Castile, leading to the conquest of Granada in 1492 and then the expulsion of the Jews in the same year and of the conquered Moors in 1505, had serious negative consequences: 'as so often, Europe took a wrong turning and wasted the spiritual resources which might have been used constructively' (ibid.: 13-4). Lull, however, could not be charged with such liberal views, as the aim of his method was missionary: he developed his method of analogy in order to demonstrate the truth of Christianity, and thus to convert the Jews and the Moslems (Yates 1982: 4). In developing his method, he made ample use of the techniques to enhance memory, or 'mnemonics', transmitted from Antiquity through Islamic scholars,¹⁶ and was also familiar with Cabala. Both these innovations had important effects – the art of memory was still practiced by Bruno, while Pico would work Cabala into the Ficinian synthesis of Neoplatonism and Hermetism, thus inventing Christian Cabala.

All this, as Yates would emphasise, does not mean simply the pursuit of Antiquarian history, nor a Cynical immersion into the dark undercurrents of modern science or the Enlightenment. The central motive, uniting these various threads in the Renaissance, was the aim of intellectual and moral reform (Yates 1979: 177). The crucial point is that the Reformation of Luther and Calvin was not alone to propose such an undertaking; and, even more importantly, the various strands did not simply provide

¹⁶ See Yates (1976). Foucault also considered that such techniques of memory were central among the various 'techniques of self' (2001).

alternatives, of which the 'best' won, but deeply interpenetrated each other. A most important aspect of this interpenetration was the curious phenomenon of "'Puritan Occultism'", or the 'Puritan version of the occult philosophy' (Ibid.: 177; see also p.181). This, however, can only be understood through a glance at some Elizabethan developments.

The Elizabethan roots of Puritanism

Historians of the 'chosen people' motive in Puritanism often argued for the unprecedented character of this development, the fact that it was alien from popular tradition and mentality (Yates 1979: 179). This, however, is mistaken, as this conviction is safely rooted in the Elizabethan age. Thus, the 'wedding together of' the myth of the New Jerusalem with England, or 'the tremendous theme of "Jerusalem and Albion"' already goes back to the 16th century (Ibid.: 181).

Surprising as it may sound, Yates argues that '[s]o far as the history of thought is concerned, the Elizabethan age is still basically unexplained. At both ends it is mysterious, both where it came from and what became of it.' (Ibid.: 5). One crucial example could be given by bringing together two of the best known episodes of the period, the myth of the 'Virgin Queen' on the one hand, and very real the start of British overseas expansionism on the other. Though seemingly miles apart as naive myth on the one hand and cynical *Realpolitik* on the other, the work of Yates makes it clear that both are rooted in exactly the same factors: the pervasive concern with reform and revival (Ibid.: 177), the search for moral purity (Ibid.), which made Elizabeth into a Neoplatonic heroine, and which justified rising British imperialism in Messianistic terms.

The two main figures of this development were John Dee and Edmund Spenser. Dee was 'the true philosopher of the Elizabethan age' (Ibid.: 104), a Christian Cabalist who followed the works of Pico, Agrippa and Giordano Bruno, but who 'had expanded these influences in new scientific and politico-religious directions' (Ibid.: 104). As far as

the former is concerned, he paved the way for Bacon who - as it has been argued for eg. by Paolo Rossi, the Italian editor of Weber's GARS - was steeped in the Renaissance tradition, with his 'Great Instauration' rooted deeply in millennial hopes (Yates 1984: 62; see also p.247, and 1979: 185, 187). Concerning the latter, Dee can be described with the strange label of being 'a Christian Cabalist and a British imperialist' (Yates 1979: 103) at the same time. Here Dee combined the medieval religious tradition of the 'Holy empire' with the Renaissance Christian Cabalist concern of reform, with the claim of Elizabeth's mythical descent from King Arthur, and finally using the myth, going back to the age of invasions, that the British monarchs has Trojan origins (Ibid.: 84-5). 'Arthur was the supposed descendant of Brut, and was the chief religious and mystical exemplar of sacred British imperial Christianity' (Ibid.: 85). John Dee could thus be considered as '[t]he architect of the idea of British Empire' (Ibid.: 156).

If Dee was the chief philosopher of the Elizabethan age, Edmund Spenser was its most famous court poet. The Neoplatonic influences of his major epic poem 'The Faerie Queene', playing a central role in spreading the myth of the 'virgin queen', are well known and studied. However, it is less known, argues Yates, that Spenser was also a 'very serious Puritan' (Ibid.: 95), who took his reforming zeal from similarly occult sources, especially the Christian Cabalist and Neoplatonist Francesco Giorgi, a Venezian Franciscan friar (Ibid.: 29-36, 95-102). However, Giorgi could only exert such an impact of Spenser as his thought had been prepared for such an influence through 'an Arthur-British element to form a kind of "British Israel" mystique' (Ibid.: 103); and exactly this was provided by the philosophy of Dee.

These influences came together and produced the epic poem in a genuine liminal moment, the defeat of the Spanish Armada. The poem therefore 'expresses a "prophetic moment"', with 'the queen appear[ing] almost as the symbol of a new religion, transcending both Catholic and Protestant in some far-reaching revelation, and transmitting a universal Messianic message' (Ibid.: 104). Yates concludes this line of argument by stating, provisionally, that 'an influence of Christian Cabala underlies the

profound seriousness of the courtly Puritanism which was Spenser's religion, and which he infused into his vision of the religious role of Elizabethan England' (ibid.).

These mythical hopes soon vanished, already in the 1590s, and both Dee and Spenser ended their lives out of royal favour. However, as if following the spirit of the Nietzsche-Weber-Foucauldian 'genealogical method' (Szokolczai 1998), Yates emphasises that the undertaking did not disappear, but was continued in other forms and by other means: '[n]either the millennium nor the Messiah had come, but the great tide of spiritual effort left something on the shores of time when it receded. In 1660 the Royal Society was founded, tangible evidence of the arrival of Science (Yates 1979: 186). Another, and closely related form was the re-launching of British nationalism and expansionism of the 17th century.

From Spenser to Milton

As we have already seen, Yates draws parallels between Elizabethan imperial ideology and revolutionary Puritanism throughout the book, coining expressions like 'Puritan Occultism' or Elizabethan Puritanism. In the penultimate chapter, she moves to make her central claim. The ground for 'Milton's vision for England' as 'a nation of chosen people, chosen in the Hebraic sense', to fight the Papal Antichrist was prepared by Spenser, as 'Spenser had envisaged Elizabethan England and its queen as chosen for just such a religious role' (Yates 1979: 177). Thus, Milton was 'the inheritor of Spenser's Hebraic type of patriotism' (Ibid.: 179). At the centre of the 'profound basic similarity between the religious outlook' of Spenser and Milton is the strong messianistic elements present in both (Ibid.: 177-8).

The differences are minor compared to this outlook, and are related to the exact modality in which their visions were expressed: while Spenser was a monarchist, Milton was a republican; and the chivalry epic of Spenser, inspired by the tale of King Arthur and his knights, was replaced by the Biblical epic of *Paradise Lost*. Among the mediators

of this influence, Yates claims to have discovered the 'missing link in the argument of Milton scholars', the impact of Christian Cabala, partly through Agrippa, Giorgi and Dee, and partly through Fludd and Rosicrucianism (Ibid.: 179).

Puritan and Jewish Messianism

There is only one aspect left in the story told by Yates: the exact relationship between these British developments, the astonishing resurrection of the tribal dream of a 'chosen people' in a Christian, post-medieval context, and the people originally associated with the idea, the Jews. Though elements of this complex were touched earlier in the book, and in Yates's work, especially as related to the 'Christian Cabala' of Pico and his followers,¹⁷ in the last chapter of his last book, and in some related late publications, Yates approaches 'the difficult task [...] of seeing all these movements as fundamentally Hebraic in character' (Yates 1979: 167).

The affinities between Hebraism and Protestantism, also emphasised by Max Weber (1995), were already recognised by the protagonists. While movements of church reform in the Middle Ages were often accompanied by rising anti-Semitism, a 'striking feature of English Puritanism' is the 'sympathy with the Jews' (Yates 1979: 184), culminating in the official return of the Jews to England under Charles II. More important however, is the direct impact at the level of thought, due to the revival of Hebraic studies in the Renaissance, and through Christian Cabala. An as yet unexplored, indirect impact can be attributed to the rising Messianism among orthodox Jews in the 16th and especially 17th centuries, fuelled by the spirituality of the new Lurianic Cabala, an outcome of the expulsion of the Jews from Spain in 1492 (Yates 1984: 251).

¹⁷ Relying on recent specialised studies, Yates emphatically claims that it was that not simply Jewish Cabala, but Christian Cabala that had an impact on Milton (e.g. Yates 1979: 179). This is again an important demonstration of Yates's methodology: relatively obscure and failed, thus forgotten strands in thought play extremely important role, as they render possible later changes, paving for them the way, enabling them to rely on already existing, if minor traditions.

A striking indication of such connection is provided by the temporal coincidence, and eventual links, between Puritan England and the intensification of Messianistic expectations in the Amsterdam Jewish community in the mid-17th century, explored by the then recent study of Gershom Scholem (1973), culminating in the 'extraordinary story of Sabbatai Sevi' (Yates 1979: 186). Sevi, born in Smyrna but moving to Amsterdam, with the magnetism of his prophetic personality gradually assumed leadership of the Messianistic movement, and in 1665 declared himself the Messiah. This led to a 'mass movement of enthusiasm' in Jewish communities both East and West (Ibid.), but soon came a just as extraordinary anti-climax, as the following year Sevi apostatised to Islam.

All this might be considered just as an episode – though a particularly striking one – in the history of obscure social movements and forms of thought. Yates, however, evidently does not think so. Crucial for her is the parallel dynamics of the 'excited expectation of a coming divine event' (Yates 1979: 185) among English Puritans and Amsterdam Jews, even though the latter expected the Messiah while the former the Second Coming. The significance, helped by the mediation of Christian Cabala, lies in the repetition of the 'original situation from which Christianity derived' (Ibid.: 189), as if doubling Christianity over on itself, or Judaism on Christianity. At the levels of expectations and experiences,¹⁸ apocalyptic Puritans and Messianistic Jews could identify with each other, which led to a peculiar short-circuiting of emotions and thought. The effect of the discharge was lasting and significant.

Let me offer two comments to close this section. First, this 'doubling over' identified using the work of Yates is surprisingly close to what Michel Foucault pinned down in his classic work as the specific movement of thought characteristic of the *episteme* of the classical age – an age that Foucault claimed to have started around 1650 (Foucault 1973). Second, Spinoza (1632-1676) grew out exactly of the space and the time of the Sabbatai movement. As Jonathan Israel (2001) argued recently in his *magnus opus*, Spinoza can be considered as the source of the radical wing of the Enlightenment, which

¹⁸ On this theme, see especially Koselleck (1985: 267-88).

would suggest that, apart from the Royal Academy and its role in fostering modern science, and the economic and colonial feats of the Puritans, even the rise of the Enlightenment can be safely connected not just to the 'secularisation' of Protestantism, but also the various occult reform and spiritual revivalist movements.

The United States

I realise that, as far as current concerns go, the link between the 'People of God' motive and current American attitudes and policy might be the most relevant part of this paper; unfortunately, it is here that I can offer the least in terms of substantive comments. The problem is that, due to a relative shortness of time, there is much less existing research available; and that, at any rate, I need to do much more research. So all I can offer are a few points of departure.

The first point is historical and rather trivial. It is well known that the most significant part of the New England settlers of the 17th century were Puritan refugees; and that the mentality identified for Britain was even more characteristic of their world outlook. Indeed, the imagery of the conquest of the Promised Land, of this 'new frontier' has been ineradicably present in the American consciousness, from the belief in a land of unlimited opportunities through Westerns and their contemporary variants up to the famous 'frontier' theory of Frederick Turner (1996), one of the classics of American historiography. This idea can also receive support from one the first, and unfortunately little acknowledged work of Lewis Mumford (1970), where he argues that the history of the United States can only be understood as the offshoot of the collapse of the medieval European worlds order.

The second point shifts the emphasis from the adjective 'Puritan' to the noun 'refugee'. Given the enormous power exerted today by the US, one is tended to disregard the fact that the most important and singular layer in the collective identity of the country is derived from the experiences of religious refugees. The crucial importance

of such refugees for the history of thought in various periods (Ionian Sophists after the Persian conquests and their impact on Athens, Coptic and Syrian refugees and their impact on Irish monasticism, German and Jewish scholars escaping Hitler, etc.) has been recognised, even though the parallels have rarely been drawn. The difference of the Puritan refugees was that they were not simply thinkers, prophets or sages, but had unique nation-building ambitions.

The third point concerns the frequent parallels drawn between the Roman Empire and the current American world domination. As it is usually the case, such parallels are illuminating, but only if taken out of the context of propaganda and journalism. One should notice that the idea of drawing parallels between Rome and the United States is not at all new. In fact, just as politicians and historians in Britain traditionally felt an affinity with Greece, in the US there was a certain cult of the Roman Republic that had a particularly strong impact on the Federalists. Furthermore, that parallel was perceived with the Roman Republic, and not with the Empire. This is not just a mere issue of ideology and rhetoric: superficial similarities apart, the US does not function as an empire. In this regard, one should rather follow, in opposition to recent quasi-bestsellers like the book of Antonio Negri, the insights of two of the most encyclopaedic historians of the past century, Eric Voegelin (1962) and Immanuel Wallerstein (1979), all the more so as they reached their identical conclusion at the radically opposed ideological end: the modern age is the end of the age of empires. Finally, one should add that Rome was not part of the 'axial age'.

The arguments made in this paper could serve as background for research on various claims made by Bush, and important members of his staff, about the special religious overtones, occasionally amounting to outright divine support behind the military undertaking. It would be quite wrong to dismiss such claims as merely cynical or ideological. These claims were effective, as they mobilised deeply rooted and powerful aspects of the American **identity**. Discourses can only mobilise if they manage to stir up emotional support; and such a support can only be based on elements of collective identity. These elements are beyond the reach of rational considerations; they

are certainly not simply interest-driven, as very often go directly against personal interests. Furthermore, they can be latent, buried deeply in the back of the mind, or often only in obscure historical memories, only to be resurrected, with amazing strength, at the most unexpected moments. For both cases, Yugoslavia could serve as a good example, as at the height of Titoan Communism, in the 1960s and 1970s, nobody could have thought that within decades the country would collapse in the midst of violent civil war; while Serbians supporting Milosevic clearly acted against their best personal interest, making the country that just a decade earlier was the most liberal and affluent of all the Communist states into a pariah people – a necessary consequence of Serbian behaviour in the context of the 1990s, as it was evident to any external observer.

Conclusion

At the end of any similar undertaking, where vital current developments are traced to remote religious origins, the question of the meaningfulness of the entire undertaking is inevitably posed. Is it possible at all to trace such lineages over times and across the dividing line, evidently insurmountable, that separates religious from secular, 'real', material concerns?¹⁹ And, after all, what does all this matter?

This question, in the form of a general attack on 'secularisation' theories, is indeed at the heart of an interpretation of modernity that is increasingly gathering influence, Hans Blumenberg's (1983) thesis concerning the 'legitimacy' of modernity. Blumenberg claims that such 'secularisation' theories are indeed wrong; that modernity was not simply the outcome of the 'secularisation' of certain Christian values and institutions, but had its own, different and sovereign agenda, the 'self-assertion' of the individual.

¹⁹ Weber evidently did not think so; one should only recall the famous 'hair-breadth' that, according to him, separated science from religion.

Needless to say, this paper hopes to gather argument against Blumenberg. It is not possible to present here a detailed critique of his position, but let me make three comments that raise fundamental queries concerning his entire undertaking. First of all, it is puzzling that Blumenberg presents his thesis by attacking Karl Löwith only, without even mentioning – or should I say: without daring mention – the name of Weber, though the entire ‘secularisation’ thesis, and Löwith’s work in particular, took off from Weber’s work. Furthermore, though Blumenberg’s book indeed marshals an impressive mass of historical evidence, the question of the ‘secularisation’ thesis does not depend on erudition, rather on sense of judgment, the power of discrimination or discernment. Finally, the entire question of the ‘legitimacy’ of modernity seems to be misplaced. The term is derived from a legal terminology (and is again Weberian); but this cannot be posed with respect to the age in which we live, which is a social fact, in the straightforward Durkheimian sense.

Beyond the Blumenberg thesis, there are at least three reasons why the arguments presented in the paper could claim contemporary, and even vital relevance. First of all, in spite of post-modernism, facts are indeed stubborn things, and the fact is that the war in Iraq, and in general the most explosive conflicts in our times, are indeed waged between nations who had the questionable privilege of having claimed in the past (in certain cases also in the present) of being the chosen ‘people of god’. One can, of course, go in various ways in explaining this fact, but this does not change the significance of the problem.

Second, and moving from contemporary politics to general questions in social theory, there is the issue of ‘collective mobilisation’. According to the logic of liberalism and rational choice, people are solely moved by their interests. This approach, however, fails to give a proper account of the reasons why people are capable of actions that go against their evident interests, risking even their life in pursuits that, merely according

to the logic of material gains and interests, seem chimerical.²⁰ Ever more puzzlingly, how does it happen that entire groups of people are able to behave in this way?

At a first level, the problem is solved by the concept of 'collective identity'.²¹ People are willing to act against their individual interests if such a action is required in order to defend or promote an even more basic aspect of their identity – collective or personal. A particularly clear example is to sacrifice one's life in defence of one's home – a clear counterexample of Hobbes's self-preservation principle, argued in detail by Pizzorno (1991).

However, in itself this argument still fails to explain not simply active aggressiveness, warfare and conquest – as, in itself, such action can be explained by simple interest-driven considerations –, but the fact that such acts can be perpetuated with full good conscience, and by relying on the support of ethical religions or philosophies, or axial systems of thought. Thus, this problem is identical with the one posed by Max Weber concerning the rise of modern capitalism: the issue is not simply the rise of acquisitiveness and greed – which, in itself, is an anthropological constant; but the combination of acquisitiveness with its opposite, asceticism, or the ethics characteristic of the major world religions. It is at this level that Weber rightly identified the singular roots of capitalism.

The situation is that parallel with the question of warfare and conquest, or expansionism and colonisation. The problem is not simply that people, at least some people, are violent and aggressive, just as others are greedy. It is not even that such people always gain the upper hand – which, by the way, is not necessarily true, as there are all kinds of legal, political, religious and philosophical means to limit the power of the strongest. The real problem is rather the following: how could it happen – as it indeed happened, together with a number of other phenomena, in the modern Western expansionism – that such an aggressiveness could be combined and justified with

²⁰ This question is one of the central themes in the life-work of Alessandro Pizzorno.

²¹ See first of all the pioneering work of Pizzorno (1986, 1987, 1991, 2000); also Somers 2000). See also Eisenstadt and Giesen (1995).

exactly the type of thought that came into being in order to contest and limit such aggressiveness?

Once the question is posed in this way, the reference to religious and spiritual factors not only becomes legitimate, but imperative, as the only possible way to pose the problem. The answer is offered along parallel Weberian lines: just as the secularisation of medieval monastic asceticism, in the form of the inner-worldly asceticism of the 'Protestant ethic', provided the breakthrough force of modern capitalism, it was the secularisation of the various medieval sectarian movements, resurrecting the spirit of the handful chosen 'people of god', but associating it to the nation-states that, in the form of the inner-worldly eschatology, provided the breakthrough force of the aggressive, world-conquering impulse behind the modern nation-state.

This perspective also helps to formulate two sharp, related, and no doubt highly controversial, diagnoses of this development: the diagnosis of re-tribalisation and of islamisation. The first means that in spite of all the feudal and dynastic fights and war of the Middle Ages, at the level of legitimate aspirations and the civilising process, the medieval world had a degree of political and religious unity that was fragmented into the world of reason of states and the perpetually warring nation-states of the early modern and modern period, culminating in two devastating world wars. It is in this sense that the period between 1517 and 1945 could be described as a period of re-tribalisation, only ending with the European unification process. Second, certainly paradoxically, but well fitting into the line of thinking pioneered by Nietzsche and the logic of the common origins of the opposites, the Crusades and the Reformation can be described as major stages in the 'islamisation' of Europe – in the sense that through these two processes the most questionable elements of the Islam, the right of a 'holy war' against the infidels (at the level of collective identity), and the definition of identity partly based on a distance from the infidels, partly based on the psychology of conviction in personal salvation, themselves drawing upon the Old and New Testaments, came to have a dominating influence on Western, Roman Christianity; and

it were these two impulses that became secularised in the ever increasing drive for globalisation.

I would like to stress here again the specificity of the exact meaning of secularisation. The rise of modernity is rooted in the collapse of the medieval world order; and the clearest examples of this collapse are the – primarily and respectively economically and militarily driven – secularisation processes characteristic of Italy and Spain. This type of secularisation, however, in itself proved to be weak. Spain was the pioneer of the European conquest, and Italy was pioneering the rise of capitalism. However, these processes were in themselves weak, as – at the level of the most powerful moving force of collective identity, religion or spirituality – Spain could only produce the negative impulses of the Inquisition the expulsion of the Jews, while Italy the corrupt and cynical renaissance popes, or the self-defeating extremism of Savonarola. The ‘success’ of these efforts required the additional momentum of various waves of the reformation, including the ‘occult philosophies’ studied by Yates, and the joining of the socio-economic and politico-military efforts in a single country, in Britain, to gain the definite momentum – which then again could be secularised, denying vehemently the originally religious impulses that were absolutely inevitable and necessary for their triumph.

Beyond the general question of secularisation and the similarities with capitalism, however, I would like to return back to the specific issue of collective identity, as regards to the hubristic self-identity of a ‘people of god’.²² Recalling the arguments concerning the ‘depth’ of collective identity and the possibility to mobilise, at the right moment, aspects of collective identity that seemed to have been buried deeply in the past, I would like to call attention to the highly specific character of such a claim of being the ‘chosen people of god’. It is true that every singly tribe had its own gods; and

²² According to Greek thinkers, hubris was the main source of the upheavals of the first global age. However, a sense of being selected does not always lead to hubris – for a counterexample see Jeremiah (e.g. Jer 1: 6-8).

that at any time of history, from Babylonia to the Mongolian Empire and beyond, various cultures and civilisations always fought their wars under the protection of their own god. However, at a level that is not easy to identify, this is fundamentally different from the idea that there is only one god; but this single and omnipotent god has chosen exactly **us** as his chosen people. The explosive potential resides in this combination of universality and exclusivity, and the resulting excess of arrogance. At one extreme, we have the assertion of universality and the giving up of the chosen people claim, where the problem of arrogant self-assertion disappears. At the other extreme, we have complete exclusiveness and the giving up of any claims to universality, where the external threat disappears again. However, in between these two poles, we have numerous possible modes in which the self-proclaimed 'elite' of God feels fully justified to impose its will on other people, with a kind of arrogant denigration of the less lucky that in other contexts would be inconceivable. One might perhaps argue that it is this arrogance, and the resistance it inexorably evokes, that sustains the most bitter conflicts in our age, whether this is the problem of racism in the US, the conflict of Northern Ireland, or the situation of the Middle East.

The final point concerns the question of globalisation. The issue is not whether we live in a global age, but rather what does it mean that we live in a global age **again**? I believe that this is the right way to interpret Nietzsche's insight concerning the eternal recurrence of the same, the circular pattern of history – but this also means that we need to read it in a manner radically different from Nietzsche's. The point is exactly not to rejoice about the defeat of Christianity and Plato, and the return of the great values of fierce warriors and their modern twins, the 'captains of the industry' (Veblen), rather to diagnose the source of the ills, using Nietzsche's method against his substantial ideas, in the modern union between the forces of the 'world' and of the 'religious rejection of the world', in the form of the claim on our earth of the various self-appointed people of god. As, arguably, this is the main stake of the current stage of globalisation.

As a last remark, I would like to clarify that this paper is not written simply 'against' globalisation. Aspects of history are clearly irreversible. Furthermore, globalisation (then and now) does have its clear benefits; the civilising impact of the Roman Empire survives up till our days, marking clearly the difference – for e.g. – between those areas of Europe that were under its impact and those that were not. Similarly, current globalisation requires no summary judgments, rather a careful weighing of the merits and ills of the globalisation process. However, the recognition of the deeply spiritual and religious, even axial, roots of the current moving forces of globalisation, and of the parallels between the two global ages, helps us to realise that the new age of globalisation can only be encountered by a certain kind of return and revitalisation of the same kind of axial systems of thought that emerged exactly to meet the challenge of the first – or the previous – global age.

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Social theories are analytical frameworks, or paradigms, that are used to study and interpret social phenomena. A tool used by social scientists, social theories relate to historical debates over the validity and reliability of different methodologies (e.g. positivism and antipositivism), the primacy of either structure or agency, as well as the relationship between contingency and necessity. Social theory in an informal nature, or authorship based outside of academic social and political science, may Certain social theories attempt to remain strictly scientific, descriptive, and objective. Conflict theories, by contrast, present ostensibly normative positions, and often critique the ideological aspects inherent in conventional, traditional thought. The origins of social theory are difficult to pinpoint, but debates frequently return to Ancient Greece (Berberoglu 2005, p. xi). From these foundations in Western philosophy arose Enlightenment social contract theory, sociological positivism, and modern social science. what is meant by discourse analysis? social theory. The "Natural Language School" in Analytical Philosophy. Linguistics. Michel Foucault is often called a philosopher and a social theorist, sometimes a historian and a literary critic, but also a post-structuralist thinker. One can see these identities merge into a single project, at least, if we can agree to call him "a critical historiographer of the humanist discourses of modernity". Social theories are frameworks of empirical evidence used to study and interpret social phenomena. A tool used by social scientists, social theories relate to historical debates over the most valid and reliable methodologies (e.g. positivism and antipositivism), as well as the primacy of either structure or agency. Certain social theories attempt to remain strictly scientific, descriptive, and objective. Conflict theories, by contrast, present ostensibly normative positions, and often critique the Social Theory are social theories are frameworks of empirical evidence used to study and interpret social phenomena. A tool used by social scientists, social theories relate to historical debates over the most valid and reliable methodologies (e.g. positivism and antipositivism), as well as the primacy of either structure or agency. Questions (220). Publications (93,252). Questions related to Social Theory. 1. 2. 3. Chouaib Achacha. asked a question related to Social Theory.