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## **Samuel Štefan Osuský's Theological-Prophetic Criticism of War and Totalitarianism**

### *Osuskýjeva teološko-preroška kritika vojne in totalitarizma*

*Abstract:* This article analyzes the thought legacy of Samuel Štefan Osuský (1888–1975), a famous Slovak philosopher and theologian, pertaining to his fight against totalitarianism and war. Having lived during arguably the most difficult period of (Czecho-)Slovak history, which included the two world wars, the emergence of independent Czechoslovakia in 1918, its fateful, forceful split by Nazi Germany in 1939, followed by its reestablishment after WWII in 1945, only to be afflicted again by a new kind of totalitarianism on the left, it is no surprise that Osuský aimed his philosophical and theological criticism especially at the two great human ideologies of the 20<sup>th</sup> century – Fascism (including its German, racial version, Nazism, which he preferred to call »Hitlerism«), and Communism (above all in its historical shape of Stalinist Bolshevism). After exploring the human predicament in »boundary situations,« i.e. situations of ultimate anxiety, despair but also hope and trust, religious motives seemed to gain the upper hand, according to Osuský. As a »rational theist,« he attempted to draw from theology, philosophy and science as complementary sources of wisdom combining them in his struggle to find satisfying insights for larger questions of meaning. Osuský's ideas in his book *War and Religion* (1916) and article *The Philosophy of Bolshevism, Fascism, and Hitlerism* (1937) manifest the much-needed prophetic insight that has the potential to enlighten our own struggle against the creeping forces of totalitarianism, right and left that seek to engulf our societies today.

*Keywords:* Samuel Štefan Osuský, communism, bolshevism, Nazism/Hitlerism, anthropology, war

*Povzetek:* Članek analizira miselno zapuščino Samuela Štefana Osuskýja (1888–1975), znanega slovaškega filozofa in teologa, ki se nanaša na njegov boj proti totalitarizmu in vojni. Osuský je živel v najtežjem obdobju (češko-)slovaške zgodovine. V njem sta se zgodili dve svetovni vojni in potem, 1918., nastanek neodvisne Češkoslovaške, ki pa jo je 1939. silovito in usodno razklala nacistična Nemčija. Po drugi svetovni vojni, leta 1945, je bila Češkoslovaška ponovno vzpo-

stavljena, a jo je takoj spet prizadela nova vrsta totalitarizma, tokrat levega. Zato nas ne preseneča, da je Osuský svojo filozofsko in teološko kritiko usmeril zlasti v dve veliki človeški ideologiji 20. stoletja: fašizem (vključno z njegovo nemško, rasno različico, nacizmom, o katerem je raje govoril kot o »hitlerizmu«) in komunizem (predvsem v njegovi zgodovinski obliki stalinističnega boljševizma). Zdi se, da je Osuský, po raziskovanju človeške stiske v »mejnih situacijah«, tj. v razmerah skrajne tesnobe, obupa, pa tudi upanja in zaupanja, dal prednost verskim temam. Kot »racionalni teist« je poskušal črpati iz teologije, filozofije in znanosti kot komplementarnih virov modrosti, ki jih je povezoval v svojem prizadevanju, da bi našel zadovoljive odgovore na večja vprašanja smisla. Osuskýjeve ideje, iz njegove knjige *Vojna in religija* (1916) ter članka *Filozofija boljševizma, fašizma in hitlerizma* (1937), razodevajo prepotreben preroški uvid, ki lahko razsvetli naš lasten boj proti potuhnjenim silam totalitarizma, desnega in levega, ki danes poskušajo zavladati naši družbi.

*Ključne besede:* Samuel Štefan Osuský, komunizem, boljševizem, nacizem/hitlerizem, antropologija, vojna

## 1. Introduction

Samuel Štefan Osuský (1888–1975) was a bishop of the Lutheran Church in Slovakia and a professor of theology at the Lutheran Theological School in Bratislava. One of the most versatile intellectual of the Lutheran Church at the time, Osuský was known for his expertise in philosophy (including philosophy of religion), psychology, religious history, and sociology. He grew up in humble circumstances as a son of a tanner. Nevertheless, he got good education, first at the High School in Trnava (Trnavske Gymnasium) and then Lutheran Lyceum and the Theological Academy in Bratislava. Osuský continued in his theological studies abroad, first in Erlangen, then in Jena and Leipzig and later in his philosophical studies at the Faculty of Philosophy of Charles University in Prague. He earned his doctorate in philosophy in Prague in 1922. His second doctorate was from law (from the Law Academy in Presov, Slovakia, in 1941). Osuský's whole professional life was connected with the Slovak Lutheran Theological Faculty in Bratislava where he started teaching as assistant professor in 1919, later becoming a tenured, full professor of philosophy. Unfortunately, it was not his old age that made him quit his beloved job but rather the communist totalitarian machinery made him abdicate and accept an early retirement in 1950, at the age of 62.

In philosophy, Osuský's major areas of interest were Slovak and Slavic philosophy. When it came to his religious/theological outlook, Osuský could be characterized as a rational theist striving to build upon the foundation of his Lutheran heritage. Instead of revelation, liturgy or the church's tradition, however, he tended to prefer metaphysical reasoning in his theological-philosophical argumentation. Neither the emerging movement of personalism, nor religious existentialism found much favor in his eyes. Though Osuský could never be identified with one

movement of thought or philosophical school, he often quoted »Emanuel Radl, T.G. Masaryk, Henri Bergson, Nikolaj Lossky,« and others mostly from the idealist camp (Gažík 2012, 4). Along with Emanuel Radl, Tomas Garrigue Masaryk (from Czechia), and Jan Lajciak with Jan Kvacala (from Slovakia), Osuský was well aware of the bankruptcy of the humanistic ideals and positivistic, scientific optimism of liberal intellectuals prior to the era of the World Wars. He aimed his philosophical and theological criticism especially at the two great human ideologies of the 20<sup>th</sup> century – Fascism (including its German, racial version, Nazism), and Communism (above all in its historical shape of Stalinist Bolshevism).

It is not easy to answer conclusively the question whether Osuský was more a philosopher or a theologian. As a »rational theist,« he attempted to draw from both sources of wisdom combining them in his struggle to find satisfying insights for larger questions of meaning, such as: What is life's meaning? What is the purpose of humanity, or a given nation? How much can we know? What is the relationship of faith (religion) and science (scientific inquiry)? Osuský was convinced that a theologian locked into dogmatic propositions and/or focused merely on the church's tradition will not be competent to delve into the many diverse intellectual challenges of his era. He therefore decided to be a theologizing philosopher with intentional sensitivity to anthropology, history of ideas, and history of culture (above all the Slavic culture). Yet, Osuský never departs too far from theology or existentially relevant religious philosophy. When it comes to exploring to situation of humans in »boundary situations,« i.e. situations of ultimate anxiety, despair but also hope and trust, religious motives seem to gain the upper hand. This is especially true with regard the two world wars that Osuský witnessed take their tolls on humans around him as well as the larger society. Looking for a meaning behind the unspeakable suffering, Osuský resorts to point out the need of religious values, of faith and God – which philosophy can never provide.

Osuský's legacy is both stimulating and unsettling in an age when we seem to experience similar »signs of the times« like he did in the interwar period (especially the 1930s). Our evaluation of his legacy is based primarily on his two crucial works in which he deals with the phenomenon of war and the two evil, human ideologies that sprang up to life in the course of the 20<sup>th</sup> century – Fascism (including its special, racial manifestation in what Osuský calls »Hitlerism«) and Bolshevism (a hyper form of applied Communism). Both of these ideologies resulted in inconceivable suffering and the deaths of millions. How can we prevent our societies from lapsing back into a new »social death« resulting in the next genocide<sup>1</sup> or »re-education« labor camps? Osuský's ideas in his book *War and Religion* (1916) and his article on *The Philosophy of Bolshevism, Fascism, and Hitlerism* (1937) manifest the much-needed prophetic insight that has the potential to enlighten our own struggle against the creeping forces of totalitarianism, right and left.

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<sup>1</sup> In connection to this problem, I recommend an incisive treatment of the phenomenon of genocide as a result of »social death« by the Slovenian author Bojan Žalec (2013).

## 2. Osuský's views on the war and its relationship to religion

The question concerning the relationship between »War and Religion« is a foundational question, in Osuský's view, where other important concerns meet and/or get their relentless urgency. Whether it is the question of the suffering of the innocent, or the relationship of God's Kingdom to the earthly kingdom(s), they all seem to point to the ultimate question that was asked during the Great War (WWI): »How could a just God allow such bloodshed?« (Osuský 1916, 3) The way Osuský articulates this question makes it even more poignant: »How could such highly praised culture and humaneness have laid such utmost terror on the shoulders of man? How could the most Christian and most enlightened of nations have burned with such terrifying anger against each other, forgetting everything that is Christian, honorable, conscientious? How is it that the more noble are more prone to fall than the lesser!?!« (3) While Osuský admits that being in the midst of the war frenzy renders any and all interpreters unobjective (to a considerable degree), he feels the burden to address this question and asks God for helping him with this task. He does so despite expecting to add only »a few burning charcoals into the fire« (4) of literary treasure of the nation.

Dealing first with the question »What is war?,« Osuský outlines several possible answers from philosophers, politicians, theologians, and, curiously, from the children in his religious classes. He mentions Augustine and his »Just war theory« and goes on discussing the various aspects of war relative to the defensive purposes of the secular state. While not rejecting war as a last resort to defend one's country, Osuský mournfully observes (quoting Martensen) that »War is the most powerful proof of the depravity of human nature, the greatest plague of the earth. Even if weapon be given by God, it is misused in sinful hands of men.« (Osuský 1916, 6)

Osuský then goes to the issue of religion. He has a succinct answer to the question »What is religion?«: »Religion is the collection of all divine and human expressions relative to God. There are two directions that we find in religion. One goes from top to bottom, from God to creation; the other from bottom up, from man to God.« (Osuský 1916, 7) These two movements are not equal, the former taking precedence over the latter both in time and potency, according to Osuský. God is always the initiator of the movement and enabler of man's return to a pristine state from which humans have fallen due to sin. In the anthropological dimension, then, religion is »a collection expressions of inner piety, it is life, which comes out verbally in confessions – dogmas, and in real life in the cult and morality.« (8) Osuský is convinced that war and religion are two incommensurable phenomena, each relating to a different sphere of action and responsibility. The former pertains the mundane realm, natural rights and political justice; the latter relates to one's spiritual wellbeing and eternal salvation. Nevertheless, there is an intersection which, if misunderstood, can become a cause of much confusion and unfortunate action. God's relationship to his creation includes namely his relationship to war (as something that humans, created in God's image, are responsible for); furthermore,

due to man's relatedness to God and God's creation, it is necessary to establish what ought to be man's attitude to war. Osuský surveys available New Testament interpretations of war, including examples of how the NT texts treat soldiers of that time. He then continues to offer a summary of John Hus', Martin Luther's, and the Lutheran Symbolic Books' (Confessions) thoughts on this topic. Next follows an outline of the reasoning of German theologians (living shortly before or during Osuský's time), most of whom endorse the war (WWI), comparing it to the legitimate fight of emperor Constantine the Great to conquer in the name of God (e.g. Viktor Schultze, professor from Greifswald). (19)<sup>2</sup>

The next section in Osuský's book on *War and Religion* is devoted to what the Slovak Lutheran theologians think about the war. He notices that most Lutheran pastors tend to be cautious about pronouncing judgments, let alone instigating people to embrace the seemingly omnipresent war frenzy. Their statements are pastoral, prompting for alleviation of the suffering of the wounded soldiers and praying for peace. The role of the church is seen primarily in preparing for and working towards peace. Some theologians reflect on the possible reasons behind the war, arguing that God is punishing the evil of human hearts, letting human nations wage war against each other. Yet, this is not God's original plan, perhaps not even an active doing but rather a passive divine justice, allowing these things to happen as a self-induced punishment. Osuský lifts up (above all others) Martin Razuš' stance toward the war, reminding his readers of God's passivity with regard to ongoing human war efforts and the utmost illegitimacy of calling upon God's name when fighting for victory. (Osuský 1916, 24–28) Critical remarks are offered pertaining the magazine *Straz na Sione* [The Zion Watchtower] whose articles tended to euphemize the disastrous consequences of war, lifting up instead the potential »benefits of war.«<sup>3</sup> This magazine wished to portray the war as something that »God wanted,« to Osuský's dismay. (29) New phone lines, post offices, telegraph, and rail roads are listed as concrete examples of so-called war benefits.

In the final section of his book, Osuský offers his own reflection on what he calls »God and war« (revealingly, not »Religion and War«). (Osuský 1916, 31f) He divides his reasoning to two complementary sections: a) the relationship of God to war and b) the relationship of man (a Christian believer) to war. When approaching God from a theological perspective, we must consider his qualities and character traits, argues Osuský. He identifies three classes or types of divine attributes: (1) the physical class – representing divine omnipotence, omniscience and eternity; (2) the logical class – representing justice, holiness, and wisdom; and (3) the ethical class – comprising goodness, benevolence, and faithfulness. Depending on which of these types of divine attributes one wishes to promote as foundational or decisive, one ends up either in the camp of what Osuský calls »Pagan-Mohammedans,« or the »Old Testament-Jewish« camp, or the »New Te-

<sup>2</sup> Osuský, 1916, 19. Osuský offers the example of 13 German professors teaching at various universities in Germany of the period.

<sup>3</sup> Osuský alludes here to the magazine *Straz na Sione*, vol. 11, no. 1, 1914 and later to vol. 23, no. 3–4 1915.

stament-Christian« camp. (32) One may thus find biblical evidence for his approach and justify one's views based on an imbalanced and therefore inadequate theological understanding of God. Osuský does not agree for a naïve understanding of God based solely on His attributes of goodness and/or benevolence. Instead, he is convinced that Christians should assume these »ethical« attributes of God as foundational for any human theological discourse on God and his relationship to his creation. Nevertheless, divine power and justice (»physical« and »logical« attributes) must balance out the primary emphasis on goodness, qualifying it and situating it in a proper context. »God is neither a pagan, arbitrary tyrant, demanding fear of his slaves; nor is He a deity relentless in His justice; but while being omnipotent and just, He is, above all, our good and gracious father, whom we ought to fear as his children but whom we can also love.« (36) If understood properly, one must conclude that God neither sends, nor will the war. Because we live in a relatively free, fragile war, influenced largely by the imperfect decisions of human agents, forces of evil sometimes result in conflicts and wars. God allows this to happen as part of His providential care of the creation.

Osuský observes that it is not given to us humans to be able to analyze the nature and decisions of divine providence. We do not really know why a good, just and omnipotent God does not prevent wars from happening or stop them once they have started. This question leads us, according to Osuský, all the way back to paradise, to the fall of Adam and Eve. He suspects that the value and virtue of human freedom has something to do with God's seeming lack of action when it comes to stopping the suffering. Divine omnipotence is ordered by His justice (including wisdom) and goodness and even when we wished that He would act, His is a higher plan. Our role is not to judge God for what we believe is an unwarranted absence or a lack of action but rather to trust in His plan based on His promises and His dealings with the fallen humanity in the glorious history of salvation. Yet, the sting remains, as Osuský observes, commenting on Romans 11:33–34. We do not understand fully why some »innocent« people suffer so much apparently meaningless evil; nor do we comprehend how some are »hardened« to remain in their rebellion. (Osuský 1916, 38) The only possible vindication, if we may call it such, will come in the eschaton, at the end of times. God will act and He will bring good out of evil, and all of His actions will be the perfect combination of goodness, justice and wisdom. His current passivity is an indication of our misery and our task to learn from our mistakes and to mature morally/spiritually.<sup>4</sup>

When it comes to a Christian's relationship to war, Osuský changes the tone of his reasoning from a more theological/dogmatic one to an ethical one. Humans are citizens of the earth, of specific countries defined by national principles and led by imperfect leaders. This means that there are times when nations must protect their sovereignty by going into a war. The whole question is complex and complicated, as Osuský admits. To navigate these dangerous waters, he suggests at the outset that Christians must always be able to distinguish the two planes of responsibility – (1)

<sup>4</sup> Osuský (1916, 38) speaks of a »pedagogical aspect of war« in this respect.

towards God (*coram Deo*) and (2) towards humans (*coram hominibus*) and the creation. If one must fight in a just (i.e. defensive) war, one does it solely as his civic responsibility, never as his religious calling (i.e. in the name of God). War is not a tool to secure salvation, nor to find favor in God's eyes. (Osuský 1916, 39) It is, however, an act of Christian faith when a Christian, drafted to be a soldier, sacrifices himself in the war effort of his country. It is equally an act of faith to decide to be obedient to one's earthly government (legitimate rulers) and to fight or even to kill as part of a legitimate defensive war effort. Yet, as Osuský is quick to point out, »the art of fighting should be dictated by his Christian conviction. Even if his counterpart were a political enemy, [the Christian] must always see him religiously as his neighbor. He must thus strive to render him unfit for combat in the gentlest possible way, for example by taking him captive.« (44) On the other hand, those revolting against any involvement of Christians in the war are fanatics who have lost their sound judgment. In Osuský's view, such people wish to remove the consequence of human depravity while completely ignoring its roots. »Those agitating against war and not against its cause, is disregarding reality, ignoring the human predicament, uselessly raving about how they [i.e. humans] should be.« (44) The task of the Christian citizens should be to always work toward cultivating human virtues, overcoming sinful desires and the consequences of sinful actions, alleviating human suffering, and helping in the process of reconciliation among the warring parties. Neither wars, nor human ideologies (e.g. Socialism) will bring about world's peace, according to Osuský. (47)

This last idea proved to have a prophetic value. As time progressed after the Great War (WWI), it became obvious that Osuský's predictions of the imminent dangers of applied Marxism (especially in the form of Stalinist Bolshevism)<sup>5</sup> and various strands of Fascism were right. Not humanly invented, totalitarian (and pseudo-religious) ideologies will usher an age of peace and prosperity. The only worldview that Osuský hopes has this potential – at least on the European continent and only when applied competently in the realm of human civic responsibilities – is »internationalized Christianity.« (Osuský 1916, 50)<sup>6</sup> What follows is Osuský's struggle against what emerged as arguably the most insidious dangers to human dignity the world has seen so far – Fascism, Hitlerism, and Bolshevism. Osuský's legacy here is an important one.

### 3. Osuský's Struggle Against Fascism and »Hitlerism«

Among Osuský's many pronouncements against Fascism, especially in the form of German »Hitlerism,« or Nazism, one stands out as uniquely systematic and

<sup>5</sup> For the ideological background and conditions of the success of the October Bolshevik revolution see Malmenvall 2017.

<sup>6</sup> On the political importance of Christian faith and its decisive role in grounding of democracy, in the light of Kierkegaard's thought, see Žalec 2017. For Tocqueville's view on the same subject see Rožič 2017. For Christianity as a positive factor of tolerance, and therefore peace and democracy, see Žalec 2018. On the Christian potential for renunciation of the will to violence in the light of Girardian theory see Ekpunoby 2018.

deep. Osuský made it at the meeting of Slovak Lutheran pastors in Ružomberok on November 11, 1937. His lecture *The Philosophy of Bolshevism, Fascism, and Hitlerism* was delivered to Slovak Lutheran pastors some of whom had been known to either openly support or be latently inclined toward the Nazi ideology. Osuský was not alone who fought against the tyrannical ideology of Fascism (in its varied forms) and Communism (above all in the form of Soviet Stalinist Bolshevism). Thus, on November 11, 1937, three other men stood beside him, each in his own way made the case for freedom, democracy, and genuine Christianity – all of which they saw as complementary and mutually reinforcing. Professor of pastoral theology, Ján Jamnický (1878–1967), professor of systematic theology, Ján Beblavý (1898–1968), and pastor Juraj Struhárik (1893–1969).

All four lecturers concurred that theology of liberal Protestantism had led in Germany to a deviation from Christ's Gospel, as well as the original, gospel emphases of the German reformer, Martin Luther. This liberal Protestant theology resulted in an idolatrous worship of the visible church and uncritical praise of modern human culture as manifestations of God's will and creative power. It was through the human creative genius and racially pure fellowship of the elect that God's glory was best manifested and, as such, should be celebrated and protected. The people of God thus ceased to be a diverse community of convicted and pardoned sinners, learning to receive God's grace and reflect His mercy and called to proclaim repentance and the forgiveness of sins in the name of Jesus Christ. The nature of the Christian Church was no longer defined primarily by the in-breaking of the Kingdom of God to the mundane reality of our tangible world. The people of God was now perceived as a racially pure community of the elect, called to fill the earth and embody the divine mandate to rule and govern those who are inferior; or, worse yet, to remove that which is deemed as malignant, which cannot be cured.<sup>7</sup> Jamnický, Beblavý, Struhárik, and Osuský in unison called the gathered Lutheran pastors back to Luther's theology, emphasizing his theology of the cross over against the deviant theology arising from racial ideology that transforms Christian faith into a religious idolatry of the Arian Christianity. (Hinlicky 2016, 80–81)

In his lecture on the philosophy of Bolshevism, Fascism, and Hitlerism, Osuský set out to analyze the sources underlying Fascism, including the racial-biological conception of Fascism of Adolf Hitler – Osuský called this version of Fascism, »Hitlerism,« commonly known as Nazism. Osuský did not have enough time to provide a comprehensive account. Given the historic situatedness and its immediate needs, he explored the Lutheran »flirting« with the ideas of Fascism as he observed it in history and the present. Osuský identifies four elements the synergy of which helped Fascism emerge as a potent ideological movement. (1) The first one is the Renaissance movement with its preference for nation instead of the church. (2) The second one is Machiavelli's *The Prince* (1532). This is, according to Osuský, »the first teacher of Mussolini and his fascism. It is only necessary to insert the

<sup>7</sup> Ján Šafin observes that similar dynamics can be seen in the early 1920s in Russia with regard to the communists' rise to power and the fate of the Jews in Russia. (Šafin 2017, 106–107)



word »Duce« [Leader] in place of the word »prince« to see this.« (Osuský 2013, 203) (3) The third one is Hegelian idealistic philosophy and, finally, (4) Giovanni Gentile<sup>8</sup> (1875–) whom Osuský calls »the official philosopher of fascism« (204) and who, in Osuský's view, built on Hegel's philosophy by adding a specific, voluntaristic and actualistic flavor to it.

»The foundation of Gentile's metaphysics is the act of knowing in the sense of action and this, furthermore, in the sense of a creative action of the mind. /.../ Only this is what is alive to Gentile, what exists as the ego in its act of consciousness. Reality is only thinkable to the extent that it is really thought. Thinking does not comprehend reality, as it is, but creates reality. Philosophy then is and ought to be a creator of reality.« (204)

Osuský points out that Gentile makes the philosophical mind into a creator of reality. The act of knowing as *doing*, as an act of a creative mind in the ontological sense, is the constitutive foundation for Giovanni Gentile's metaphysics. It is the human self through its intentional thinking (deliberating) about reality, which gives reality its validity; in fact, the self *creates* (in a way) reality itself. Truth is not based on the correspondence or identity of the things being known and human reason; nor is it based on the identity of sense perception and reason but rather on the identity of reason and will. To know is to think intentionally. It is to think and to desire, to will that which the self thinks about – and this means to act. What Osuský sees behind the ideology of Fascism, but also behind the ideology of communism, which is, surprisingly, not much different from Fascism, is the modern philosophical concept of the sovereign self. (Osuský 2013, 205–206)

This uneasy relationship between two seemingly opposing ideologies could be observed in Mussolini's case, too, according to Osuský.

»In general, it is necessary to understand his Fascism [i.e. Mussolini's] as a reaction to Communist action. Even though he was a socialist, and in his worldview, there remain certain elements of socialism, he is nonetheless consciously antidemocratic, antirationalist, antipositivist, because according to him these tendencies are the foundation of democracy, and he is an enemy of democracy. Zdenek Smetacek (1933, 208–215) calls his tendency *collective spiritualism*. The world does not exist, it must be created by the human mind, will.« (Osuský 2013, 206)

Paul Hinlicky rightly sees that the Cartesian project of the modern era that framed into antipoles the thinking subject of man and the surrounding material world, engendered a Western political economy, which, despite its technological advances, failed to solve the key human problem/predicament: the sinful greed

<sup>8</sup> Igor Tavila (et al. 2019, 139) argue similarly in their recent study, claiming that »Fascism's rise to power in Italy directly involved the main exponents of neo-idealism – the dominant philosophy at that time: Giovanni Gentile and Benedetto Croce, who were promoters respectively of the Manifesto of the Fascist Intellectuals and the Manifesto of the Anti-Fascist Intellectuals.«

of the human heart (*concupiscentia*). Technological progress and economic well-being entail in the context of such greediness the stench of nihilism as we could so blatantly see in the death-camps of the »Third Reich.« »Gentile, who was Mussolini's ghost-writer, is thus exposed, and expositied by Osuský to lay bare the roots of fascism in the modern doctrine of the sovereign self.« (Hinlicky 2016, 81)

To prop up the doctrine of the sovereign self, the Fascists needed to absolutize the immanent dimension of this world, ridding it of any vestiges of transcendence and overarching meaning. But such »plane of immanence,« i.e. »the world freed from Providence, teachers and reasons for things,« (Adkins-Hinlicky 2013, 203) in which nothing whatsoever is or can be transcendent, is, minimally, the philosophical reality of our times: the descent of the modern sovereign self into the dark night of post-modern nihilism.« (Hinlicky 2016, 82) Osuský saw this coming, in fact, he saw it unfolding before his very eyes in Italy, the Nazi Germany, and he feared that this vision of reality was creeping into Czechoslovakia in the late 1930s.

In addition to idealizing the *sovereign self*, Osuský criticized the *idealization of the state* and the *aristocrats* who allegedly had the natural right to rule and »guide« the state. Quoting the Fascist writer Julius Evola (1898–1974), Osuský writes: »The light of a sublime myth shines in us aristocrats, in beings whose visage is frightful, who breathe freely in a world freed from Providence, teachers and reasons for things, but now looking into the shadows where there is no God and where they themselves are his creators.« (Osuský 2013, 210)<sup>9</sup> The world »freed from Providence, teachers and reason« is a dark, shadowy world the reality of which should not be celebrated but rather dreaded. Yet, as Osuský revealingly observes, the new aristocrats »breathe freely« in this world, being accountable to nothing but their own conjured up dreams and ambitious goals. What else could this be than »a definite piece of gigantism, of modern titanism,« claims Osuský. Yet, the aristocrats do not act in their name but in the name of the divinized state, an absolute example of modern collective titanism. »We said that fascism divinizes the state and in it sees the incarnation of the mind of the nation. From all that has been said we see that the gigantist mentality of the nation takes the place of God for fascism and that politics is religion for it.« (210)

There is yet another root of Fascism, according to Osuský: *the idealization of war*, which stand on the metaphysical presupposition that war is the deepest nature of all things. This view prompts us to believe that conflict is the primary (in fact even normative) expression of life and its vitality. If understood well, life requires both physical and mental vitality. At times it even demands acts of heroism and sacrifice. Conflicts on the individual level are not desirable in view of the needs of the totalized, divinized state, however. In place of international solidarity and class warfare advocated by the communists, Mussolini and other fascists call for a class solidarity and national warfare. Life is full of vicious dynamics, always in motion, permeated by conflict and war. This dynamic is the most fundamental law of history and cannot be avoided (not in the long term, in any case).

<sup>9</sup> Osuský here cites Herbert Schneider's book *The Making of the Fascist State* (Schneider 1929, 346).

Therefore,

»death awaits whoever does not fight. War is inevitable because in life there are antitheses-again a point of contact with Communism. Equilibrium, like equality, will never exist, neither then peace, only that, while Communists bring a Darwinist war between classes, Mussolini brings one between nations. [Mussolini] is an open imperialist, because, he says, imperialism is eternal, and laws do not change life. Whatever is living must expand.« (Osuský 2013, 208)

Obviously, each fascist leader wishes to achieve this with his nation. So, ultimately, if one follows this logic to its inevitable conclusion, the world is and will remain in a state of war of all against all.

Against such fascist idealization and absolutization of the state, against the sovereignty of its political power, and against this kind of Nietzschean voluntaristic nihilism, Osuský invokes the terrible ethical consequences of such approach to reality. A return to the tradition of Christian Platonism and an open, public acknowledgment of transcendent God being the only viable foundation for morality, according to Osuský, are the only bulwark against the demonic spirit of Fascism (but also Hitlerism and Bolshevism, as we read in Osuský's texts on the subject). One might be under the impression that Osuský was overreacting. After all, Czechoslovakia was democratic in 1937. It had its Western allies, it had a democratic tradition (though only two-decades long, since 1918) and it (rather the peoples living in its geographical area) had over one-thousand-year long history of the Christian tradition. To be sure, the situation of Czechoslovakia in the 1930s was in many respects different from the one in Mussolini's Italy. Osuský acknowledges this. He marvels about how it might be possible for the Roman Catholic Church of that time to find a *modus vivendi* with Mussolini's regime. More importantly, however, he issues a prophetic warning against what he perceived as echoes of Mussolini's rhetoric in the slogans of the Hlinka Volk's Party. Osuský cannot hide his fear that the Catholic majority in Slovakia (eastern part of Czechoslovakia) may be tempted to replace Christ with a new, political messiah, just as it had happened in Italy. Yet he is even more surprised to see the Slovak Protestant minorities, especially his fellow Lutherans, to be inclined to favor this malignant ideology. Osuský can see only two reasons behind this: either the Lutherans do not know the true nature of Fascism and do not realize the dangers of its political and social implementations; or, which is equally bad, they do not know their own identity.

In his critique of Hitlerism (i.e. German Nazism), Osuský identifies this emerging German ideology as a Neo-Darwinist synthesis of new discoveries in genetics, applied on the human races and human societies. Since genes are the constitutive foundation of human traits, rather than upbringing, genetics should be seen as decisive for determining which groups of people – e.i., which races – are more noble, worthier, more advanced and, on the other hand, which races are inferior, backwards or even toxic for the rest of the human kind. Thus, according to Hitler,

we should follow nature's example here and let the human societies be govern by the same laws of evolution. Less evolved organisms (or, in this case, nations and races) have no rightful claim on Earth's limited resources and space. More complex genomes must not be limited by their inferior counterparts – this is the primary force of evolution, as well as of the development of human history. As Osuský sums up: »if in the struggle of natural selection the stronger triumph and if the Germans are the higher race, so the race must go to war with the less valuable races and triumph.« (Osuský 2013, 213) The Nazi ideologists have thus biologized the concept of the modern, sovereign self from Fichte, Spengler, and Nietzsche, (Hinlicky 2016, 83)<sup>10</sup> situating it into a continuous struggle of human races for resources, living space and supremacy. As it is race that (allegedly) creates culture, technology as well as all scientific knowledge, all must be evaluated on racial principles. The weak must not be allowed to live at the expense of the strong. It would be not only »unnatural« but also »inhuman« relative to the superior, entitled race.<sup>11</sup> The Judeo-Christian humanism had perverted the values in Western civilization for almost two millennia, becoming one of the principal enemies of the higher races. The Jewish race, according to Osuský's interpretation of Hitlerism, is not only a representative of an inferior culture but rather is a destroyer of culture as such, a parasite that needs to be eliminated.

The Slavic nations do not have much better prospects. Osuský warns in his lecture that the Nazi anthropology underestimates the Slavs, although without any supporting empirical evidence. After all, it is equally impossible to prove this »myth« as it is impossible to emphasize a principle of racial purity – since European races have been mixed so much through the past centuries. All of this leads Osuský to issue an urgent warning: if the current Nazi propaganda depicts the Slavs as inferior people who cannot enjoy full freedom, lest there be a »racial chaos,«<sup>12</sup> this same propaganda will result in ruthless acts against those who are ranked even lower than the Slavs – the Jews.

Hitlerism overlaps with the Italian Fascism in many respects, thus claiming its unique place in the family of diverse Fascist movements. Like Mussolini's Fascism, Hitlerism was extremely nationalistic, authoritarian, exclusivist, propagandistic, and expansionistic. Hitler wished to make his nation, represented and constituted the higher, German Arian race, respected, more powerful, independent, larger and more successful. While Mussolini's Fascism demonized Bolsheviks (on the

<sup>10</sup> Osuský holds Nietzsche more responsible than others. He observes that in the book *Thus Spake Zarathustra* Nietzsche »erected as the new ideal of the individual and of the nation the Übermensch with his lordly morality and the Will to Power as his chief feature over against the slavish Christian morality« (Osuský 2013, 213).

<sup>11</sup> Instead of just summarizing Hitler's ideas, Osuský quotes from the *Mein Kampf* extensively to support his analysis: »The strong drive away the weak, because the life instinct always crushes the ridiculous bonds of the so-called humanity of individuals and in its place introduces the humanity of nature, which destroys and devours weakness, in order to grant a free field of play to actual strength.« (Osuský 2013, 214); the corresponding passage in Hitler's book can be found in (Hitler 1936, 49).

<sup>12</sup> Osuský summarizes the thoughts here of another famous German Nazi ideologist, Alfred Rosenberg, who in his book *The Myth of Blood of the 20<sup>th</sup> Century* asserts that »to acknowledge freedom today for Czechs and Poles means to be wed to racial chaos« (Osuský 2013, 219).

class-political principle), Hitler's Nazism demonized the Jews as a race (a racial principle was intentionally employed). Curiously, Hitler spoke of building democracy, a true »German democracy,« which »consists in the nation which as a whole freely chooses its Leader, who resolves to take on himself all responsibility for everything that happens. In this democracy the majority does not vote, yet the individual decides.« (Osuský 2013, 214)<sup>13</sup> And this one, aristocratic, enlightened individual becomes the new »Fuehrer« of the Volk, a political Messiah who sets a new goal of the human life: it is not the wellbeing of the state but rather of the race – entitled and destined to subjugate and rule. (214) As nation is purely a biological phenomenon, »a blood organism, the individual is only an organ of the whole without rights, but only with duties.« (216)

#### 4. Osuský's Struggle Against Bolshevism

Soon after the war (WWII), the atmosphere was »shaped by a reshuffling of the political forces in the renewed Czecho-Slovakia.« (Olexák 2018, 155) As mentioned before, we find intriguing parallels and overlaps between the extreme right ideologies of Fascism and Hitlerism (as racial type of Fascism) and the ideologies on the extreme left – Communism, especially in its applied version of Stalinist Bolshevism. Osuský was one of the few intellectuals of his times in Czechoslovakia (and in Europe) who realized with full soberness the evil lurking behind the socially luring façade of Bolshevism. Due to a lack of space, what follows is a succinct summary and evaluation of this ideology, based on Osuský's November lecture in 1937.

Osuský starts with a philosophical summary of Communism, pointing out that the essence of this »philosophy of materialism« can be boiled down to two words: »dialectical materialism.« (Osuský 2013, 194–195) Following a short outline of thinkers from the distant to a near past (beginning with Democritus) who may serve as precursors to Marx's more developed and radicalized ideas, Osuský turns to what he calls contemporary »official« dialectical materialism of Marx and Engels. Matter is the first »thesis« of this dialectics, instead of the Spirit (as we see in Hegel – which is why Lenin used to call Hegelianism »inverted materialism«). (195) Yet then Marx takes up Hegel's »dialectical idealism« to explain his own dialectics. Osuský sees a major tension and stumbling block for the Communists, because these two tendencies (i.e. materialism and idealism) are contradictory. One must attribute the thinking property to matter in order to overcome this contradiction. Mind then becomes the antithesis to matter, as it arises out of matter, yet remains bound to it forever. The dynamic of biological evolution is ascribed to this dialectic so that at a certain stage of development, mind necessarily develops from matter as its antithesis.

»Development or change /.../ take place dialectically, namely, with a thesis to an antithesis and thus to a synthesis, to new, mutual influencing union of antithe-

<sup>13</sup> Osuský cites here Hitler's *Mein Kampf* (Hitler 1936, 73).

ses.« But what is more important, this »dialectic of development, does not relate only to being in the kingdom of space, in nature, but also to being in the kingdom of mind and to history in the kingdom of time.« (Osuský 2013, 196–197) Humans, as thinking beings, react to what is going on around them in the historical world in a subjective manner, as they are »determined by natural and historical impressions and by [their] subjective elements.« (198)

In its »reaction psychology,« Bolshevism wishes to create a psychology which would fit in line with the above-described view of reality (determined materialistically and dialectically). Knowledge arises from praxis and is tested in praxis for its validity. If it can be used to the benefit of the proletariat, it assumes the status of a »true knowledge,« if not, then it is rejected as impractical and hence »untrue.« The Bolsheviks are only interested in »productive« (i.e., economically and politically practical, useful) scientific knowledge. »There is no absolute truth, truth is what development demands and proves itself in the praxis of the proletariat.« (Osuský 2013, 198–199)<sup>14</sup> The Bolshevistic philosophy of history draws from the reaction psychology conceptualized in this manner. From this follows that »in history the basic, motor force of history is matter, i.e. economic interest. The human being is the product of economic relations. The idea does not form relations, but relations form the idea. Everything ideological-politics, laws, morality, philosophy, religion-everything is only a reflection, reflex, superstructure of the economic.« (199) All of history can be (and, indeed, must be) seen through the prism of the struggle of economic classes, which has a progressive character, just as the Darwinian evolution in the sphere of biology. This evolutionary process, however, does not progress without tensions and temporary setbacks. Nevertheless, when the situation is ripe in the industrial societies of the West, following a growing alienation of the working class from the fruits of its labor (or when the war-stricken Russian feudal society is close to collapsing), a proletariat revolution will achieve the next stage of development. »The goal is the destruction of classes, a classless society by means of the dictatorship of the proletariat. The individual is only an atom of the total-collective proletariat.« (199) Osuský notices that the Russian communists were not able to achieve a society of pure collective property but that they instead had to revert to a partial ownership of property under the NEP (Lenin's New Economic Policy of 1921).

But Osuský's major criticism does not focus on the Bolshevistic economic ideas; he rather focuses on religion and ethics. He is very troubled by their new definition of morality – »Morality is what serves the proletariat. Good is what is profitable to the proletariat. Evil is what is not profitable to the proletariat. /.../ There are no absolute moral names, as there is no absolute truth.« Christian morality may have helped exploited people for a time, but it also complicated and slowed down the inevitable social progress by delaying the coming revolution. In Russia, a new Kingdom is being built, »the kingdom of the proletariat.« »Communism with the organization of the proletariat actualizes the kingdom of the proletarians and of equa-

<sup>14</sup> Osuský sees a surprising affinity of this reasoning with American Pragmatism.

lity.« Especially troublesome, according to Osuský, is the principle according to which »everything and anything that serves this goal is good and permitted. Look! The end sanctifies the means!« (Osuský 2013, 200) The collective thus swallows up the individual. Human dignity is secondary. In fact, it is only fully attributed to the collective of the proletariat. Human individual rights are tentative; they are only to be upheld if it suits the development of the collective toward a truly classless society of equals. Furthermore, as Osuský insightfully observes, Bolshevism is characteristic of its voluntarism: »to know the necessary is needful, so that we know what is possible and to act necessarily according to the knowledge of what is possible. Therefore, the philosophy of Bolshevism can be called also the philosophy of the will, voluntarism, action, activity.« (201) However, such voluntaristic activism, which is willfully blind to normative moral principles and values, is bound to lead to humanitarian catastrophes. Osuský predicted this at a time when Europe was still unaware of the existence of the Russian death camps, the gulags. He could prophetically see that a blind, fanatical faith in the paradise promised to be ushered by the »dictatorship of the proletariat« (liberated, allegedly, by communist propaganda) would necessarily yield bitter fruits for countless victims.

## 5. Conclusion

Osuský offers the following summary of why the Christians must reject extreme ideologies on both sides of the spectrum: we must reject Bolshevism for religious reason because it is atheistic and materialistic; Hitlerism from a Christian perspective because it is naturalistic and thoroughly evil.<sup>15</sup> We must reject the terror of Fascism in any hidden forms because of its negation of individual freedoms and dignity of the human being. We must not receive any of these either as Christians, or Lutherans. The last sentences of Osuský's lecture carry an emphatic appeal to his listeners and, indeed, to next generations of Christians in Czechoslovakia and beyond:

»[T]he method, terror, the denial of individual freedom, we cannot accept neither as Christians nor as Lutherans, and Hitlerism we cannot accept either as Slavs. I have expressed my astonishment at how anyone from the ranks of the Lutherans could agree with fascism, and no less astonishment do I express how anyone from the Slovak Lutherans could sympathize, preach, and write sympathetically about the philosophy of Hitlerism.« (Osuský 2013, 220)

Concurring with Paul Hinlicky's (2016) recent analysis of Osuský's legacy, we wish to lift up the following three assets native to Osuský's personality as an in-

<sup>15</sup> For an incisive critical study of Nazism and Stalinism, perceived through the existentialist perspective of Kierkegaard, see Bojan Žalec's (2014) study on Nazism and Stalinism in the Light of Kierkegaard's Thought. Inspired by Bellinger's interpretation, Žalec introduces » Hitler and Nazism as an extreme pathological example of the aesthetic stage and anxiety before the good, and Stalinism as an extreme pathological example of the ethical stage and anxiety before the evil« (Žalec 2014, 443).

tellectual, philosopher, and theologian: (1) Osuský's use of critical thinking, a competence he was able to enhance by studying philosophy, was remarkable in an age of massive propaganda and relatively scarce access to information; (2) the ability to draw from his own theological heritage against the background of which we managed to reveal the pseudo-religious, idolatrous character of these ideologies; (3) the resolve to act ethically when Osuský formulated his prophetic warnings against evil that had permeated the European and Slovak societies. He did not shy away from the ethical responsibility he felt as a public theologian-philosopher who valued his heritage, while staying open to critical reflection of even his own church. His voice was important in keeping the Protestant minority in Slovakia overwhelmingly against the ideology of Fascism. On the other hand, his warning against the ideology of Bolshevism was only partially heeded after WWII. The horrors of war and the geopolitical pressure coming from one of the victorious powers, the Soviet Union, influenced many Lutheran intellectuals and pastors into believing in the communist promise of a social paradise. But Osuský's voice could not be ignored and was well respected even after the WWII and the 1948 communist revolution in Czechoslovakia. He was one of the first leading figures of the church to be officially silenced, as his license to teach at the Slovak Lutheran Theological Faculty was removed swiftly after the revolution in 1948. Osuský was forced into an early retirement and forbidden to teach or speak publicly until he died in 1975.

We propose the following observations/lessons that we can learn against the background of Osuský's struggle with totalitarianism. (1) Faulty anthropological starting points (presuppositions) will inevitably lead to desperate solutions both, on the individual as well as socio-political levels. (Tagirov 2019, 1231)<sup>16</sup> The pervasive chaos of the greedy human heart (which Christian theology calls the state of »sinfulness«) engenders injustice, insecurity, anger (among other things), but also a desire for stability and/or equality (perceived as »justice«) at any cost. At the root of the unyielding tendency of human societies to ascribe blame to external »enemies« – whether these be the Jews, as we have seen in the racial variant of Fascism (the German Nazism), or the kulaks and bourgeoisie, as we have seen in the Bolshevik revolution and subsequent Communist totalitarian regimes in Central and Eastern Europe after WWII – is the frivolous denial of the common human predicament of »depravity,« an inner alienation and intrinsic self-centeredness of the human self.

We see this malignant externalization of the root-problem in Fascism, Hitlerism, as well as Communism. (Savelveva 2017) In them we find the unjustified conviction that »we can build a happy, prosperous and just society if we defeat (or annihilate) the enemies of our nation or interest group (Fascism), the enemies of our race (Hi-

<sup>16</sup> Tomáš Pružinec (2019, 147) correctly reminds us that »one of the most important themes,« which has been »reflected in sectors [such] as education of citizens, their freedom, justice, public activity ... was the concept of man (ὁ ἄνθρωπος) as a person (τό πρόσωπον),« with his/her inalienable dignity and value. Upon this foundation we may now build our common house (oikonomia) of Europe with its diverse cultures, ideologies, and religions.



tlarism), the enemies of our class (Communism).« What is worse, we may suspect the same type of externalization, though not yet with the same dire consequences, in the modern Liberalism's presupposition of the blameless, neutral human self that needs only to be educated »properly« and situated into a balanced, socio-economic environment to thrive and act pro-socially/altruistically. This should then, allegedly, lead us to believe that we need to get rid of some of our outdated traditions (including the religious ones) and surrender the shaping of the society to self-proclaimed, enlightened social engineers with the ability to mold human characters through their newly-engineered social structures, educational reforms, and state institutions. We seem to suffer from this irresistible tendency to project the responsibility for the existing injustice and suffering on external causes in order to divert attention from our own, wounded, imperfect, failing, selfish self.

(2) In our attempts to save our societies and the wellbeing, to which we believe to be entitled, we then tend to idealize the state as the bearer of stability and justice (in whatever way we may perceive it). It is revealing to notice that this kind of idealization and absolutization of the state is intrinsic to ideologies on both sides of the spectrum, right and left. The chaos of the greedy human heart, unleashed with a new force in the laissez-fair capitalism at the turn of the centuries (19<sup>th</sup>–20<sup>th</sup> centuries), made it attractive for a critical mass of people to hand their fates (and many of their basic rights) over to their new leaders who began to be seen as political messiahs, such as Mussolini, Hitler, Lenin, Stalin and others. (Oborsky et al. 2018) The chaos of the greedy heart as exemplified here includes, naturally, the unjust world order of Western imperialism and colonialism of the 19<sup>th</sup> and 20<sup>th</sup> centuries. This, along with the wounded national pride and dignity of the Germans as a nation, constituted a fertile ground for the emergence of a Fuehrer who would ride on the wave of resentment and anger, making its nation commit crimes of unimaginable proportions.

A new conception of sovereignty emerged with these new leaders. Beneath its new veil, »sovereignty on the earth appears as the power to reduce human life to bare life, life that cannot be redeemed, life that is utterly banished in and by sovereignty's very assertion of dominion in the name of Providence, of law and order.« (Adkins-Hinlicky 2013, 203) Justice as an objective reality, or even as an objective to be pursued, is no longer recognized because it is »completely subordinated to the alleged needs and interests of the Volk.« Encyclopaedia Britannica 2019, <https://www.britannica.com/event/Nazism>) As Adkins and Hinlicky (2013, 203) provokingly argue, the regimes built upon this new conception of sovereignty are essentially biopolitical, having its »essence revealed in the extremities of the concentration camps of the Nazis or the Gulag of the Soviets.« But what is even more disturbing is that we can trace vestiges of this kind thinking and its malignant manifestations »in the refugees of today who are turned away, since they are merely »human«; just »bare« life, not citizens of our city under contract with political sovereignty.« (203) Our responsibility to the human race thus collapses under our perceived responsibility to the wellbeing and protection of our nation/country. How much different is this from 20<sup>th</sup> century Fascism and

Bolshevism?<sup>17</sup> And what role do media play today in the shaping of our attitudes to those divested of their dignity as present-day migrants? »The informative reflection of these processes [i.e. models of representation through media]<sup>18</sup> is, in addition to an always partial and ideological representation of reality itself, part of the social construction that is consolidated as truth in our learning process. The stereotype in the perception and consideration of migrants is one of the risks that can provoke and consolidate inequality in many countries of the world.« (Marfil-Carmona – Ortiz-Cobo 2019, 192)

(3) Some blame and responsibility for the horrors of the 20<sup>th</sup> century ought to be ascribed critically to Christian liberal theology, especially the liberal Protestant theology of the 19<sup>th</sup> century. This is not to deny the fact that »religious based communities and institutions played a significant role in cultivating both, the discontent with the regime as well as the courage and resolve of the population to stand up to it,« (Šturák 2016, 39); nevertheless, the so-called »Kultur-Protestantismus«<sup>19</sup> seemed to have shared some anthropological presuppositions with the later political proponents of the totalitarian ideologies under scrutiny. We are speaking here of the belief in an inevitable human progress – scientific, technological, as well as cultural and moral – as part of a linear progress of the history of the world, driven by the forces of natural-biological, as well as spiritual evolution (Geist Entwicklung). During this time, humble notions of human limitedness and depravity were replaced with romanticized notions of human intrinsic goodness and the arrogant belief in the human power to usher a new »kingdom of god« through human culture and technology. The ensuing futile attempts to strictly detach modern (and postmodern) politics from religion, believing that such separation guarantees purity and objectiveness of the political project, forget that »the depth origins of politics and violence are of (anti)religious and (anti)spiritual nature respectively,« as we could also witness that the phenomena of Nazism and Stalinism (Bolshevism) were not only political, but also »strongly religiously marked phenomena.« (Žalec 2014, 449)

We in the West, to be sure, are no longer dreaming the Enlightenment's dream of an inevitable progress of the educated, scientifically advanced humanity (Am-

<sup>17</sup> Besides offering a detailed analysis of Fascism, Robert Paxton asks an unsettling question: »Is Fascism over, or could it rise again?« He points out the recent developments in Europe, which cause him to be skeptical of relegating Fascism to the annals of history: »ethnic cleansing in the Balkans; the sharpening of exclusionary nationalisms in postcommunist eastern Europe; spreading »skinhead« violence against immigrants in Britain, Germany, Scandinavia, and Italy; the first participation of a neofascist party in a European government in 1994, when the Italian Alleanza Nazionale, direct descendant of the principal Italian neofascist party, the Movimento Sociale Italiano (MSI), joined the first government of Silvio Berlusconi; the entry of Jörg Haider's Freiheitspartei (Freedom Party), with its winks of approval at Nazi veterans, into the Austrian government in February 2000; the astonishing arrival of the leader of the French far Right, Jean-Marie Le Pen, in second place in the first round of the French presidential elections in May 2002; and the meteoric rise of an anti-immigrant but nonconformist outsider, Pim Fortuyn, in the Netherlands in the same month.« (Paxton 2004, 173).

<sup>18</sup> For more on the powerful influence of the media on the construction of social reality (as perceived predominantly by the youth), see: (Tyurikov et al. 2018; Zheltukhina et al. 2017).

<sup>19</sup> The first president of Czechoslovakia, Tomáš Gariggue Masaryk, seemed to have adopted this kind of religious outlook as well, believing that »religion should focus on morality, as opposed to miracles, ritual, and the notion that the Church acted as an intermediary between God and man« (Šmid 2017, 73).

brozy-Králik- Martin 2017; Omarova et al. 2018). Our burden is rather the insidious indifference in the matter of truth (Máhrik 2018, 46–47) – after all, we like to think the we live in a post-truth (post-factual) reality where nothing and no one can be trusted. (Orekhovskaya et al. 2018) But is not this self-imposed indifference in the matter of truth a major feature of the Fascist and Communist ideologies? And even if this similarity in our attitude to truth proved to be historically incidental, the similarity of possible consequences should be equally haunting and existentially unsettling. (Pavlíková 2018) Upon closer scrutiny we can establish that »the characteristics of Machiavellianism and manipulation (indirect, hidden and implicit influence, deception, disregard of moral and ethical norms and social and cultural values, focus on domination, control, coercion, use of force, use of the other as things, objects, programming of thoughts, intentions, etc.) /.../ [increasingly become] the features of public administration sphere« today. (Ibragimov et al. 2018, 404) We need to cultivate our awareness of the ambivalent nature of »securitization as a socially productive speech act that legitimizes politicians to impose urgent measures to neutralize »existential threats« (whether real or manifest), while allowing them [i.e. politicians] to ignore existing rules and procedures.« Depending on how the securitizing actor lives up to his responsibility to choose the language means and meanings of speech acts, the socio-political discourse will »lead to an increase in aggression or, on the contrary, to greater tolerance.« (Dulebová-Štefančík 2017, 59)<sup>20</sup> Social scientists warn that there is an acute need to »bring the process of social adaptation and socialization of /.../ people [especially adolescents] back to the normal state, thus reducing the risk of destructive tendencies.« (Galushkin et al. 2018, 106) With regard to the ongoing immigration crisis in Europe and globally, »an acute problem of avoiding ethnic and inter-confessional conflict risks, and erosion of national and civic identity as a result of globalization« needs to be dealt with prudently. (Ryabchenko et al. 2018, 359) However, the

»task of determining the conditions that could bring to the regeneration of interethnic communication /.../ now considered the most important strategy for ensuring civilizational security« cannot be fulfilled without »knowledge related to cultural characteristics, national traditions, customs and history of different nations that is essential in building a cognitive basis for developing respectful relations to other national cultures and their representatives.« (Seregina et al. 2019, 186)

However, following Osusky's advice, we will be able to do none of the above competently unless we learn to recover and draw from our own cultural and religious traditions, unifying the religious, philosophical, and political discourses into

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<sup>20</sup> Ambrozy and Sagat (2019, 225) rightly propose that, instead of hiding behind the slogans of objectivity, neutrality, and relativity, »in close accordance with the principle of philosophical-methodological skepticism, a teacher of philosophy [and, we may add, political science, theology, and other related fields] may assume a critical stance towards those philosophical positions which are a priori aimed at certain groups of people, and degrade them to a means to an end.«

one integrative whole. The point is not to get rid of inherent tensions in such discourse; the aim is, rather, to manage such tensions constructively as we protect the public space from absolutizing and manipulative tendencies from the side of all actors: religious, scientific, economic, cultural, as well as political. Christian public theology has much to contribute in this process.<sup>21</sup>

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<sup>21</sup> As Binetti and Pavlíková (2019, 192) remind us pertaining the issue of socially situated freedom, »the deepest intention of free becoming is personal identity that does not remain as a mere unattainable end but has its concrete fulfilment in the *presence of the self before God and alongside others*, through the unifying force of love.«

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