

Citation style

Łętocha, Rafał: review of: Bogumił Grott / Olgierd Grott (eds.),
Przedhitlerowskie korzenie nazizmu czyli dusza niemiecka w świetle
filozofii i religioznawstwa, Warszawa : Wydawnictwo von
borowiecky, 2018, in: Slovanský přehled, 105 (2019), 1, p. 105-109,
DOI: 10.15463/rec.1084797225

First published: Slovanský přehled, 105 (2019), 1



copyright

This article may be downloaded and/or used within the private copying exemption. Any further use without permission of the rights owner shall be subject to legal licences (§§ 44a-63a UrhG / German Copyright Act).

RECENZE

Bogumił GROTT – Olgierd GROTT (ed.),
Przedhitlerowskie korzenie nazizmu czyli dusza niemiecka w świetle filozofii i religioznawstwa,
Warszawa, Wydawnictwo von Borowiecky 2018, 206 s.,
ISBN 978-83-65806-34-5.

This book is a reprint of three post-war texts, with a substantial editorial introduction which serves as an introduction to the issues presented. The authors of the texts included in this volume were late Polish scientists and professors Bogdan Suchodolski and Leon Halban. The former was a pedagogue and a philosopher,¹ and the latter was an expert in the relationship between the Church and the State, particularly in relation to Germany and German religious changes.² Suchodolski published the text (included in this volume) *German soul in light of philosophy* as early as 1945 and 1947, and Halban's *Mystical foundations of National Socialism* was published in 1946 and 1948, while *Proto-German religion and its current importance in Germany* was published in 1949.

In the years after the war the issues studied by the above professors were extremely topical. They corresponded very closely with the atmosphere of that period, filled not only with the trauma of the tragic events of the Second World War, but also with the need for a scientific reflection of what had happened and where to look for the reasons for this enormous crime. The problem therefore had an aspect of practicality. It is not surprising that both Polish academics attempted to address it, each within their own speciality, marking new research pathways. There they

1 See: Wincenty OKOŃ, *Wizerunki sławnych pedagogów polskich*, Warszawa 1993.

2 See: Juliusz WILLAUME, *Leon Halban (1893–1960)*, *Kwartalnik Historyczny*, 1961, 1, p. 288; Bogumił GROTT, *Profesor Leon Halban jako badacz neopogaństwa niemieckiego i prekursor politologii religii w Polsce (w czterdziestą piątą rocznicę zgonu)*, <https://konserwatywizm.pl/profesor-leon-halban-jako-badacz-neopoganstwa-niemieckiego-i-prekursor-politologii-religii-w-polsce-w-czterdziesta-piata-rocznice-zgonu/> (last visit: 10. 02. 2019)

searched for the genesis of the political events – not only within the systemic, economic and social spheres, which would be the primary interest of historians and social and political studies, but mainly in the spiritual culture of the German nation; and, as it turned out, in the metamorphosis of its axiological sphere, significantly different from spiritual cultures of other nations. In this sphere they saw the main cause of what had happened in Germany and later, with the beginning of the Second World War, what had spread out onto the European scene. It can be safely said that in a large degree both professors became innovators.

Here it should be noted that Professor Halban as early as 1936 published in Lviv a large volume titled *Religion in the Third Reich*, of which the second, unfinished volume was lost during the war. In the book from 1936 he described, based on a wide array of sources and academic publications, the processes of religious crisis in Germany, starting from mid-19th century to the Hitler era. He analysed the activity and religious thought of theologians such as Paul de Lagarde and people who can only be described as ideologists or leaders, either rooted in Christianity (most often Protestantism) or active in spheres defined as neo-Pagan, which fully rejected Christianity. Naturally, he also included a detailed analysis of the interactions between the Church institutions in Germany and the Hitler state. Although *Religion in the Third Reich* is basically a detailed factual analysis based on a wide array of sources, it is also a reflection of its author's high qualifications in the area of axiology. This knowledge was later used and deepened in his post-war publications, of which two most notable ones have been reprinted in the volume reviewed here, and in other post-war publications³.

While Halban focused mainly on religious issues and on their influence on the social and institutional ethos, Suchodolski attempted an analysis of the German philosophical thought, resulting in the above mentioned *German soul in light of philosophy*. He noted elements which suggested an actual rejection by the Germans of both rationalism and empiricism. He considered this trend to be deeply rooted in the way of thinking of this nation, which made it different from the cultural heritage of other European nations in the period after the French Revolution. Suchodolski notes also, along with other researchers and on the basis of historical facts, that the attempts to question Christianity which took place there in the 19th and early 20th centuries did not lead to the formation of a rationalist viewpoint, as it was the case in other Western European countries and the US, but leaned instead towards other forms of religiousness. Among them were various

3 I.e.: Leon HALBAN, *Problem kultury niemieckiej*, Znak 1946 (1).

forms of neo-Paganism, closely connected with a cult of pre-Christian Germanic tribes and their apparently great and creative role in the European history. This belief, which gained strength in time with the spread of racism, significantly strengthened the foundations of German chauvinism, becoming one of its driving powers. The author of *German soul in light of philosophy* also notes a different understanding in the German culture of ideas such as good and evil, truth and falsehood. Here the author notes the opinions of various German philosophers, starting naturally with Friedrich Nietzsche, the author of such works as *On Truth and Lies in a Nonmoral Sense* and *The Antichrist*.

In Germany, as it has been noted by numerous, also German researchers, the impact in the 19th century of the ideals of Enlightenment and the French Revolution was not significant, and the authoritarian social mentality was not neutralised by the new ideas to the degree it was in other Western European countries. It became one of the factors facilitating the creation in the 20th century of a construct as unusual as the Third Reich.

As noted above, Professor Leon Halban focused his attention on other aspects of the German problem in the modern history of Europe. The axis of his studies became the crisis of Christianity, particularly notable in the Protestant parts of Germany. His dissertations in both papers included in the reviewed volume take on the fascinating subject of the genesis of the German social ethos, which over time increasingly detached itself from the influence of Christian ethics. Halban focused on issues such as the formation in Germany of the trend to construct a national religion, initially designed only as a deformed form of Christianity. The initiator of this path was the above mentioned late (d. 1891) orientalist and theologian, but also a nationalistic propagandist Paul de Lagarde, the author of *Nationale Religion*, followed by others, regarded as his continuators, such as Langben czy Bonus, and naturally also the German Christians. The reader of Halban's works will find a clearly described tendency of the regions by the Rhine and the Elbe to flush out from the Christian teachings their humanitarian elements, which were regarded as alien to the German spirit. The rejection of these elements gained strength with the deepening influence of racism in Germany. This trend was called the Germanisation of Christianity, which was described in many books of this or similar titles.⁴ Not without importance here was the German translation of the famous book by Arthur de Gobineau *An Essay on the Inequality of the Human Races* in

⁴ See i.e.: Arthur BONUS, *Zur Germanisierung des Christentums*, Jena 1911; Wilhelm SCHUBRING, *Germanisierung des Christentums*, Berlin 1904; Gustav FREYTAG, *Deutsches Christen-*

1898. The Germanised Christianity was not significantly different in the sphere of declared ethos from the neo-Pagan opinions praising the (real or possibly more imaginary) proto-Germanic tradition. The role of this tradition in the first part of the 20th century was the subject of one of Halban's works included in the reviewed tome. It is the Proto-Germanic religion and its current importance in Germany.

In works included in the reviewed volume Halban noted the importance of the social ethos which shapes human attitudes and gives permission for certain actions in the political sphere or negates or even rejects others, considering them alien. This problem is particularly interesting considering i.a. the differences in attitudes of representatives of both cooperating totalitarian regimes, Italian Fascism and Nazism, towards the enslaved nations, and towards their own citizens. The studies by Halban, but also of Suchodolski, provide a valuable roadmark pointing towards the balance point in the studies on the mechanisms of history, and show how insufficient can be the studies limited to the analyses of notable political events. Italian Fascism, despite many similarities to the state created by the national socialists in Germany, did not kill. In this laconic way its internal and external politics were summarised by Professor Krystyna Kersten in the introduction to her famous work on Communist totalitarianism titled *The Black Book of Communism*. In times of Mussolini there was no friendly soil in which fascism could have taken roots. Italian fascism, according to the historian Bocco, was a tumour on the flesh of this culture and did not have on disposal a similar base of thought as one present in Germany at the same time. It made it quite fragile as an ideology. It should be repeated here that understanding these relationships can be greatly improved by the works of the two Polish academics reprinted in the book *Pre-Hitler roots of Nazism, or the German soul in light of philosophy and religious studies*.

Admittedly, both authors only marginally touched on the issues of racism and many other historical issues important to the history of Germany and to the character of this nation's historical issues. As noted above, they generally operated in the scope of their primary disciplines, not looking too deeply into issues such as the plans of extending the German territory, as envisioned i.e. by Paul de Lagarde, who declared the need for incremental Germanisation of all the lands of the Habsburg empire and of Poland up to the Bug river. All mechanisms of imperialism deserve research in their axiological aspect, as they represent the spirit of the given nation. It can be suspected that works on this subject would have attracted other

tum, Jena 1911; Arnold DANNEMANN, *Die Geschichte der Glaubensbewegung Deutschechristen*, Dresden 1933.

authors over the following years. Perhaps the reason why it did not happen was simply that the Stalinism, increasing its pressure after 1949 in the countries dependent on the USSR, made it impossible to study the spirit of a nation, instead encouraging studies on material existence, interpreted according to the rules of dogmatic Marxism. Some subjects had therefore to be abandoned, which is not to say they should remain so. These gaps do not diminish the significance of the works of Halban and Suchodolski. The former differentiated two cultures existing in Germany. He described them as the Weimar Culture and the Potsdam Culture. While the first one included all the German achievements of a positive and universal importance, the second served the purposes relating to the so-called Prussianism and the Third Reich. Halban calls the second culture the *Germanism*, which in his opinion caused Germany's exit from Europe. It should be noted that he was not alone in this opinion. Just before the beginning of the Second World War many members of Polish and other elites were beginning to realise this.

In conclusion it should be noted that the editors of the volume, who are also the authors of the introductory chapter, connect the problem highlighted by Halban and Suchodolski with the currently famous in Germany book by Thilo Sarrazin *Deutschland schafft sich ab*. Its author in an alarmist manner warns against the increasing migration, particularly from non-European cultures, which according to him will disorganise the former, established German culture, and in a longer perspective, will dominate the population due to their high birth rates. Both editors see in this turn of events the possibility of a final and irreversible elimination of Halban's Germanism by crystallizing a new cultural quality in Germany, a process which we should not disregard. A similar viewpoint is expressed by a number of politicians, such as the former MP Jan Rokita, a member of the Civic Platform party, and Professor Karol Karski, a member of the Law and Justice party. The latter even describes it as an ethnic suicide of the German state.

Rafał Łętocha

Jiří FRIEDL – Tomasz JUREK – Miloš ŘEZNÍK – Martin WIHODA,
Dějiny Polska,

Praha, Nakladatelství Lidové noviny 2017, 690 s., ISBN 978-80-7422-306-8.

Rok před stým výročím obnovení polské samostatnosti v roce 1918 obdrželi čtenáři v České republice speciální a výjimečný dárek. Skupina autorů pod vedením Mi-