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**Religious Aspects of the 20th Century Personality  
Cult**

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## **Religious Aspects of the 20th Century Personality Cult<sup>1</sup>**

This paper is concerned with a field which until now has been considered the domain of history and political studies. I refer to the personality cult, which in my opinion was one of the most characteristic religious phenomena of the last century, existing in almost all totalitarian and some authoritarian countries: from Cuba to Korea, from Lenin's Soviet Union to Putin's Russia. In my paper I want to present it as such a phenomenon, showing the features which turn the "personality cult" into a real religious system.

### **Religious bases of totalitarian power**

Sanctity is the very essence of political power. Any kind of such power needs its own rituals, myths, and symbols. This sacred nimbus confirms the authority of the ruler, making it unusual, mysterious and – as a result – untouchable. Religion is also the main source of the legitimacy of power, changing rulers into the sons of gods (like Pharaohs, who were sons of Re), or at least kings "by the grace of God", as in the Christian world. In ancient Rome, Caesars became gods themselves, some of them even during their lifetime.<sup>2</sup> However, almost all the rulers from the past sought their legitimacy inside the existing religion of their country, such as Christianity or Roman polytheism<sup>3</sup>. The twentieth century brought a new phenomenon: the personality cult, strictly connected with totalitarianism, which usually treated religion as its personal enemy. In this sense personality cult was a kind of charismatic power described by Max Weber<sup>4</sup>. According to his theory, charismatic power (in contrast to the patriarchal one, which attributes a sacred character to the tradition and dynasties ruling in its name) was not rooted in the tradition and based on the strictly personal supernatural gifts of a new ruler. The personality cult arose in a secular society, very often after a brutal process of compulsory secularization and it didn't look for support from the old religion. It preferred to create a new one.

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<sup>1</sup> Paper presented at the British Association for the Study of Religions 50<sup>th</sup> Anniversary Conference: „The Study of Religions: Mapping The Field” at Harris Manchester College in Oxford, September 2004

<sup>2</sup> See e.g. S.Weinstock, *Divus Julius*, Oxford 1971; D.Fishwick, *The Imperial Cult in the Latin West. Studies in the Ruler Cult in the Western Provinces of the Roman Empire*, t.1-2, Leiden 1987; E. Beurlier, *Le Culte impérial. Son histoire et son organisation depuis Auguste jusqu'à Justinien*, Paris 1891; I.Gradel, *Emperor Worship and Roman Religion*, Oxford 2002.

<sup>3</sup> Even the famous pharaoh Echnaton who proclaimed himself the son of the only god Aton made the revolution „inside’ the old religion, because Aton was one of the aspects of the old god Re.

<sup>4</sup> Max Weber, *Economy and Society* (Eds. Guenther Roth and Claus Wittich) Bedminster Press, New York 1968.

Totalitarianism is in fact a religious system and its subjects are not citizens but believers. Theologian Paul Tillich calls Communism and Nazism the most extreme forms of *quasi-religions* in our times. Their ideologies became a substitute for religion and took over its functions, such as integration of the society, life ritualisation, giving answers to existential questions and the hope of future paradise. So, in Communist Russia, atheism was preached with a real religious ardour in Orthodox churches, apparently closed for ever. The new cult used rituals and symbols of the old religion in order that the traditional consciousness could easier adopt a new ideological content in an old, well-known form. However, it is not easy to confess an anonymous ideology. Thus, like every religion, totalitarianism needed icons. Thanks to the icons of a leader-god the state became less anonymous and an emotional relation between the system and the people was built.

Philosophers and sociologists are unanimous in claiming that the personality cult was usually an answer to a real and profound need for the sacred: in the state of „organized loneliness” (according to the words of Hannah Arendt), a new god replaced the deserted holy space. This was usually an intended and deliberate act, sometimes even connected with an attempt to fabricate an artificial charisma, as in the case of Stalin who lacked any real charisma<sup>5</sup>.

### **Divine features of the leader**

There are some elements that are indispensable to create such an image of a ruler-living god, such as: infallibility, omniscience, omnipotence and omnipresence, immortality, and other supernatural features.

The infallibility of the leader is a result, first of all, of the infallible ideology. The leader is its pure emanation and incarnation. As personified Marxism or National Socialism, he knows the only right way and he is never wrong. In a totalitarian system every case of doubt in the reasonable action of the leader is the worst kind of crime. But the faith in his infallibility also plays a positive role: it helps people to survive in an incomprehensible world, convulsed by terror, wars and ideological changes. One knows that there is somebody who understands the sense of events, who can embrace the whole of reality, which in fact leads to a happy future. But infallibility can also be seen as a special gift of the leader. Hitler had a reputation as a clairvoyant and he himself often repeated that he acted like a somnambulist.

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<sup>5</sup> On the fabrication of Stalin's charisma see: B.Baczko, *Les imaginaires sociaux. Mémoires et espoirs collectifs*, Paris 1984.

This gift also had an ideological explanation: he was the only exegete of the Nation and the Nation could not be wrong. An outstanding ideologist of Nazism, Rosenberg, claimed that the relation between Hitler and his nation reflected the relation between consciousness and unconsciousness. “He knows everything, he is thinking for everybody” – the Germans repeated.<sup>6</sup> General Franco also pretended to be a “sentinel” of his nation. Spanish newspapers described his clairvoyance: “From his bureau of Pardo Franco was able to see the whole reality beyond immediate events”.<sup>7</sup>

This omniscience allowed the leader to be an expert in every domain. Stalin was a great linguist; Kim Il Sung composed menus for kindergartens. Each of them interfered with all spheres of the country’s life and never blundered. One of the most popular fascist slogans was: “Mussolini ha sempre ragione – Mussolini is always right”<sup>8</sup>. In Communist China Lin Piao claimed: “Mao Tse-Tung is an eternal and universal truth. Every sentence of the works written by President Mao contains the truth; one sentence pronounced by him is worth more than our ten thousand words.”<sup>9</sup> The omniscience may also be understood as a mystical tie between the leader and a simple man. The leader-god knows all the problems of his citizens, knows how to assure them of a better future. As a good father he thinks about and cares about everybody. This is why little children in their letters confided all their small problems to their beloved “daddy” Stalin. According to one folk song, Stalin “knows about all our thoughts and problems, he cares for us all his life”<sup>10</sup>.

The omnipotence should not be understood as the simple unlimited power of a tyrant, but as a real divine power over the world. The ruler-god rules over the forces of nature: he can change the direction of rivers and transform deserts into fertile fields. In North Korea children learn at school that their beloved leader works miracles and thanks to him the sun rises and sets every day.<sup>11</sup> In China drivers carry in their cars small portraits of Mao, in the hope that he, like Saint Christopher, will protect them from road accidents.<sup>12</sup> During the war, in an orphan-asylum in the Soviet Union, a tutor asked children to pray to God for sweets. When God didn’t give any sign, children were told to ask Stalin. They began to pray to Stalin and a

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<sup>6</sup> R.Caillois, *Instincts et société*, Paris 1964.

<sup>7</sup> L.Ramirez, *Franco*, Paris 1965, p.257.

<sup>8</sup> C.Galeotti, *Mussolini ha sempre ragione. I decaloghi del fascismo*, Milano 2000.

<sup>9</sup> D.Wilson, *Mao 1893-1976*, Paris 1980, p.461.

<sup>10</sup> Józef.Stalin, *Warszawa* 1950, p. 258.

<sup>11</sup> W.Dziak, *Kim Ir Sen*, Warszawa 2000, p. 10. On the Kim Il Sung’s cult see e.g.: B.Cummings, *Korea’s Place in the Sun. A Modern History*, New York 1997; Ilpyong J. Kim, *Historical Dictionary of North Korea*, Oxford 2003; J.-P. Brulé, *La Corée du Nord de Kim Il-Sung*, Paris 1982.

<sup>12</sup> F.Dimitri, *op.cit.*, p. 5.

miracle occurred: a lot of candies dropped from the ceiling<sup>13</sup>. At the same time, during the worst days of the Second World War, Germans still believed in the wonderful weapon promised by Hitler. They believed also in his magical power, which he could transfer, for example, onto military banners. Sometimes the dictators themselves were treated as a miracle. In Franco's Spain, a children's textbook explained that "a Caudillo is a gift that God makes to the nations that deserve it and the nation accepts him as an envoy who has arisen through God's plan to ensure the nation's salvation"<sup>14</sup>.

All these beliefs prove that the modern dictatorial power is the kind of charismatic domination described by Max Weber. Frank Parkin analyses his theory: "The authority of the charismatic leader is dependent solely upon his ability to convince his followers and disciples of his extraordinary powers. He must perform miracles and heroic deeds, and continually prove his divine mission in the eyes of his followers. Unlike the bureaucrat he cannot rest on the security of office; unlike the patriarch he cannot take refuge in the sanctity of custom. He must always be ready to demonstrate his gifts by awe-inspiring acts or risk forfeiting the faith of his disciples. Like the modern sporting hero, his performance is kept under perpetual review by his adulators. Repeated failure leads to disillusionment and the quick evaporation of his following"<sup>15</sup>. In totalitarian countries, thanks to the means of propaganda, the leader never failed.

The omnipresence of the leader was assured not only by his unannounced visits in factories, but also thanks to millions of his portraits and statues all over the country. Portraits of Lenin, Stalin, Franco, Enver Hoxha or Saddam Hussein were looking at their citizens from all the walls and shop windows. A portrait of Mao Tse-Tung even adorned the Chinese Great Wall. In North Korea everybody is obliged to carry a badge with the portrait of the Great Leader Kim Il Sung. The name of a ruler-god is constantly repeated. Quotations from Lenin, Stalin, Ceaușescu or Kim Il Sung were present in all the publications: from chemistry dissertations to cookery books. There were Lenin and Stalin prizes and orders; factories, mines, cities, schools and children's sanatoria were named after their names. Kim Jong Il has even his own flower: Kimjongilia. The leader was omnipresent not only in the public space. In Soviet Russia portraits of Lenin and Stalin were hung in village huts, in North Korea every new apartment is endowed with a separate room reserved specially for the cult of Kim Il Sung

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<sup>13</sup> This story was used in Agnieszka Holland's movie *Europe, Europe*.

<sup>14</sup> P.Preston, *Franco. A Biography*, London 1993, p.5.

<sup>15</sup> Frank Parkin, *Max Weber*, New York 1997, p. 84.

and Kim Jong Il. In Nazi Germany some families left a special place at their table for the Führer.

The immortality of a leader should be understood literally. It is not his work, deeds or ideas that are to survive. It is the leader himself who is to live eternally. In the year 1973 Lenin “received” a new membership card of the communist party with the number one. After his death, Kim Il Sung was proclaimed the eternal president of the Korean People’s Democratic Republic and even his son didn’t dare to succeed him to this position. Instead of it, Kim Jong Il started to erect so called “eternal life towers” in all the cities, towns and villages of Korea. After the death of Enver Hoxha on the roads of Albania one could meet cement stars painted in red with an inscription: “Enver Hoxha: 1908 – Immortal”<sup>16</sup>. After the death of Lenin, the most frequently repeated slogan was “Lenin lives”. He was the first to be mummified and buried in a mausoleum. This pattern of immortalizing leaders became common in all communist countries. However, the leaders survived not only in their mausolea. According to the propaganda, they are still alive in all citizens. “Every member of the Party is a small part of Lenin” – we read in an official document<sup>17</sup>. However, the best incarnation of Lenin was Stalin, his Most Gifted Disciple, as the Soviet propaganda called him. The incarnation of Kim Il Sung is, of course, his son Kim Jong Il. We can read in official Korean documents: “The comrade Kim Il Sung and the comrade Kim Jong Il is the same person”<sup>18</sup>. The leader-gods claimed to be immortal during their lifetime and so societies could not believe in their real death. In the case of Ceaușescu and Hitler, there is still gossip that their deaths were simulated and that both live (or did live) abroad. In Soviet folk tales Lenin still visits his country and meets simple people after his death.

### **Elements of the cult**

All these divine features of a leader led his subjects into a real religious cult. Since the modern personality cult was first formed in Russia, the majority of its elements, at least in the communist part of the world, were borrowed from Orthodox Christianity. Litanies, icons, statues, sanctuaries, relics, holy books of the system, lights and other religious elements of the spectacle of power were very often pure quotations from the “old” religion.

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<sup>16</sup> E.&J.-P. Champseix, *L’Albanie ou la logique du désespoir*, Paris 1992, p. 15.

<sup>17</sup> *Proclamation of the Central Committee of the Communist Party, 22nd January 1924.*

<sup>18</sup> W.Dziak, *Kim Jong Il*, Warszawa 2004, p.111.

Let's start with litanies. Every leader-god had his own long litany of official names. In communist Poland alone Stalin had 336 titles. Instead of the name of Ceaușescu, the Romanian press used the following titles: Genius of Carpathian Mountains, Danube of Thoughts, Our Atheistic God, Symbol of Peace and Light, Treasury of Wisdom, Prophet Seeing the Future, The Man Who Knows Everything, Redeemer of Earth, Saviour, Our Hope, Our Warm Spring, Sweet Kiss of Fatherland, etc.<sup>19</sup> All these official titles were pronounced not only in order to pay homage to his divinity, but also, as in the Old Testament, as a substitute for his real name, as a sign of extreme respect. In Korea it is impossible to simply say "Kim Il Sung". Even in an unofficial situation, one must say: "The Great Leader Kim Il Sung". The same rule existed in Ceaușescu's Romania. In Fascist Italy the whole title of Mussolini ("Duce") was written in capitals: DUCE (sometimes expressed in Latin – DUX), although - as Jasper Ridley stresses – "in the Italian language, capital letters are used less than in English"<sup>20</sup>.

As I have already said, the portrait-icons of leaders were present everywhere: in public areas as well as in private. In Soviet Russia they replaced real icons, hung in a special "red corner" in village huts. Stalin himself kept in his study an icon of Lenin with an ever-burning lamp underneath. In Communist China people were obliged to put portraits of Mao in the place where they kept home altars before.<sup>21</sup> Also in North Korea every family must find in its home a suitable place for portraits of Kim Il Sung and Kim Jong Il. The portrait of the leader is treated as a sanctity in itself. During the Cultural Revolution the "enemies of the people" were not allowed to keep a Mao's icon in their home<sup>22</sup>. "The Economist" tells a story repeated by Korean propaganda: "When a train carrying explosives blew up in North Korea last April, setting fire to nearby buildings, several people died trying to save portraits of their "Dear Leader", Kim Jong Il, from the flames. Some rescued pictures of the pudgy dictator before searching for trapped relations".<sup>23</sup> In Korea it is forbidden to spoil or throw out newspapers. All of them are carefully collected, because every edition has some portraits of the beloved leaders. In a room decorated with Kim Il Sung's portraits many actions are officially forbidden: from making love to washing hair. In Stalinist Poland one could find official documents speaking about a "profanation" of Stalin's portraits. Icons of leaders accompanied people during state holidays. They were carried like banners with effigies of saints.

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<sup>19</sup> See e.g. J.-M. Le Breton, *La fin de Ceausescu. Histoire d'une révolution*, Paris 1996, p.31.

<sup>20</sup> J.Ridley, *Mussolini*, New York 1997, p.208.

<sup>21</sup> F.Dimitri, *op.cit.*, p.264.

<sup>22</sup> *Ibidem*.

<sup>23</sup> *Toughs at the Top*, The Economist, December 18<sup>th</sup> 2004, p.108.

During state parades, like during Christian processions, such banners were accompanied by moving statues of the leaders. In North Korea, in every city or town each manifestation is opened by a great plaster statue of Kim Il Sung. All monuments of Kim Il Sung are surrounded by a kind of religious veneration. On his birthday people put baskets of flowers under his statues, treating them as a real substitute for the living divinity. Kim Il Sung's statues are monstrous: the biggest in Pyongyang is 22 metre high. But that is nothing in comparison with the monument of his ideas: 175 metre high! In this context even the big statues of Lenin, which can be found in all communist countries, seem to be modest. In his case, the most ambitious plans were only left on paper. Stalin destroyed a sacrosanct temple of the Kremlin (the Church of Christ the Saviour), in order to build a Palace of the Soviets there, with a 100 metre high statue of Lenin on top. Likewise, in Kiev, an old monastery in the city centre was blown up to be replaced by a twenty-metre high Lenin. However, none of these plans were realized. The sanctity of Lenin's statues was connected not only with the sacred space they attempted to occupy. Lenin on his monuments took hieratic attitudes, with a stretched-out hand, showing the happy future of communism. But giant statues were not simply a Communist speciality. Benito Mussolini planned to erect on Foro Mussolini (today's Foro Italico) an 80 metre high bronze statue of semi-nude Hercules, symbolizing the Fascism. The colossus was to have the face of Mussolini and look down upon Saint Peter's Basilica. However the plan failed, for lack of money and metal.<sup>24</sup>

Leader-gods also created their own sanctuaries, visited by millions of pilgrims. Such a sanctuary in Poland was Poronin, a small mountaineers' village in the Tatra Mountains, where Lenin spent some holidays before the Revolution. In China special foot pilgrimages were organized to visit the caves in which Mao Tse-Tung lived in the years 1937-1947<sup>25</sup>. Of course, the birthplace of the leader was sacrosanct. A poor hut in Gori, where Stalin was born, was protected by a roof on marble columns and surrounded by a block of marble museum buildings. Thereby, the modest family house of the communist leader started to resemble the *santa casa* of Loretto. In Romania, Ceaușescu's birthplace was transformed into a sanctuary, and one of his sisters became the custodian of their former family house. In North Korea, not only the family village, but also each place where Kim Il Sung stopped, at least for a moment, became a national sanctuary. His every repose or word were commemorated by a special plaque.

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<sup>24</sup> D.Mack Smith, *Mussolini*, Milano 2001, p.223.

<sup>25</sup> A.Peyrefitte, *Quand la Chine s'éveillera...*, Paris 1973, pp. 24-26.



However, the most venerated sanctuaries of totalitarian states were, of course, the mausolea of leader-gods. The example was given by Lenin, or rather Stalin, who decided to present to the nation with a new, eternally living, atheistic god. The Lenin Mausoleum, situated in the centre of the Kremlin, the most sacred place of old Holy Russia, became the *axis mundi* of the communist world.<sup>26</sup> Holy relics consecrated the Revolution and gave hope for the immortality of the system. The persistence of Lenin's body in a good state became the guarantee of the survival of his ideas. This is why at the end of the Soviet time there was gossip about the decay of Lenin's mummy. And many people, simple peasants as well as intellectuals, still maintain that communism will not end until Lenin is buried. After him there were several other mummies: Stalin, Georgy Dymitrov (Bulgaria), Klement Gottwald (GDR), Ho Chi Minh, Agostino Netto, Mao Tse-Tung and Kim Il Sung.<sup>27</sup> System which negated the existence of the soul, understood the concept of immortality in a very literal way.

Following the example of the old religions, totalitarian systems had their own Holy Scriptures given to the nations by their leader-gods. In Nazi Germany it was Hitler's *Mein Kampf*; in Soviet Russia, Stalin's *The Short Course of the Russian Communist-Bolshevik Party*; in China, Mao's *The Little Red Book*; in Libya, Kadafi's *The Little Green Book*; in Turkmenistan, Niyazov's *Rukhnama* ("Book of the Soul"), kept in the Turkmen mosques next to the Koran. Even Enver Hoxha, following the example of Mao, published a little *White Book* with his speeches. Like saints' books, they contained the only right interpretation of the whole of reality, and in many countries students had to learn their fragments by heart, without changing a single word.

The next elements of the personality cult were holidays. One of the most important dates in the calendar was the birthday of the leader. This private, in fact, occasion became a state holiday in Nazi Germany, Stalinist Russia or Ceaușescu's Romania. It was particularly celebrated in Korea, where after the death of Kim Il Sung, the date of his birthday was proclaimed as the beginning of a New Era of Juche (from the name of his ideology). On the 70<sup>th</sup> anniversary of Stalin, "Pravda" ("The Truth") wrote that in future the calendar would not start with the year of the birth of Jesus Christ, but with the birthday of Stalin.<sup>28</sup>

During public holidays, one of the most important religious symbols, namely light, played a great role. From old movies we remember the Nazi parades with torches and the

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<sup>26</sup> On the Lenin's mummy see: N.Tumarkin, *Lenin Lives! The Lenin Cult in the Soviet Russia*, Cambridge 1983.

<sup>27</sup> Enver Hoxha, buried in the soil, was an exception. However, his daughter, who was an architect, made built a pyramid which contained his „relics”: clothes, books, car, and even a reconstruction of the room where he was born. (*Albanie utopie. Huis clos dans les Balcans*, Eds. S. Combe, I.Ditchev, Paris 1996, p. 152).

<sup>28</sup> M.Mikeln, *Stalin*, Warszawa 1990, p.351.

“luminous cathedral”, in which Hitler appeared. I was told that in the eighties in Korea it was common to deprive a big city of light. Then all the citizens of the city gathered at the only one bright point, a huge, richly illuminated monument of Kim Il Sung. The mystery of light leads us to the solar myth of power. Rulers of all epochs used solar mythology to reinforce their power, including the Sun King, Louis XIV. It was strictly connected with the sphere of religion. Pharaohs were called the sons of Re – the Egyptian god of sun. During the first millennium, Christ was often presented as the *Sol verus*, in reaction to the pagan cult of *Sol invictus*, connected with the imperial cult.<sup>29</sup> Power was commonly presented as light dispersing the darkness of chaos, wars and disasters. The rising sun was also a symbol of the birth of the world, Resurrection and Regeneration.

Of course, this solar myth was often exploited by the leader-gods. Everybody had heard about the Sun Stalin, but in this domain Ceaușescu outshone the Father of Nations. Among his titles there were many “luminous” ones: New Pole Star, Pure like Light, Son of Sun, Source of Our Force and Light, Symbol of Peace and Light, Sun of Nation, Sun of Carpathian Mountains, Light Outshining Sun, Living Fire. Statues of Mao Tse-Tung were adorned with sunflowers symbolizing the Chinese people following Mao in the way that flowers follow the sun.<sup>30</sup> We can imagine how strong the solar myth must be in North Korea, since the very name of Kim Il Sung, which he assumed in his partisan times, means: “rising sun”. After the death of “the Great Sun of the 20th Century”, his son Kim Jong Il proclaimed his birthday “the greatest holiday of the nation, the Holiday of Sun”<sup>31</sup>. Now he is venerated himself as “the Sun of the 21th Century”.

### **Personality cult as a true (?) religious experience**

However, all these religious ceremonies and symbols would be empty without a true love towards the leader-god. Roman Ceasars required only an official, strictly celebrated cult. Modern gods claimed something more: love of their citizen-believers. Very often it was a real one. Thanks to it every contact with the deity became a deep religious experience, giving happiness and joy (we have plenty of such testimonies from different countries). This relation of love – at least in the propaganda – was reciprocal. Sometimes it took even mystical forms.

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<sup>29</sup> J.Miziołek, *Sol verus. Studies on the Iconography of Christ in the Art of the First Millennium*, Wrocław 1991.

<sup>30</sup> Li Zhensheng, *Red Colour News Soldier*, New York 2003, p.222.

<sup>31</sup> W.Dziak, *Kim Jong Il, op.cit.*, p.49.

“I exist in you and you exist in me”, repeated Hitler. “Take our lives, take our bodies, take our souls”, answered the Germans.<sup>32</sup>

Therefore the personality cult was not a construction made only to the self-satisfaction of a tyrant. To a certain degree it also satisfied their believers, who focused all their hopes and fears in their leader. In the absence of the old religion, the personality cult was the only legal way to express religious emotions. In the dark world of terror and uncertainty, it allowed people to believe that there was somebody who took care of everything and everybody, a real Father of the nation and of each of them. It enabled millions of people to make sense of their lives and deaths. This is why the tears shed after Stalin’s death, and the mass hysteria after the death of the Great Leader Kim Il Sung, were sincere.

But “sincere” doesn’t mean “natural”. The personality cult would be impossible outside the frame of a totalitarian state. In order to exist and last it needed the whole totalitarian machinery, namely education, propaganda, isolation and fear. The brainwashing started already in kindergartens. Children and young people who never knew another reality were the main target of all totalitarian systems. They were always prompt to believe in a good Father giving a promise of a better world. The totalitarian propaganda (icons, statues, slogans of the Great Leader) was so obsessive not only in order to persuade a citizen into the new faith but also in order to create an impression there is no way out: the Big Brother can see you everywhere. But the main solicitude of the system was to keep the subjects cut off from reality, from hearing facts or views that might sap their faith.

The last but not least means used to promote the personality cult was fear. It served not only to make people silent but also to teach them to love their Leader. At the end of the Second World War in Nazi Germany there was a law against Germans who lost their faith in Führer.<sup>33</sup> In Albania children were beaten at school when, to the question: “Whom do you love more: uncle Enver or your father?”, they answered: “My father”.<sup>34</sup>

The fall of a totalitarian system always meant the end of a personality cult and a destruction of the monumental statues and icons of the false idols. They were quickly replaced with new ones: idols of the popular culture. Some of them are even surrounded by a cult which seems to be very similar to the cult of personality: like the Immortal Elvis Presley with his sanctuary of Graceland, visited by pilgrims with candles at their hands<sup>35</sup>, or Princess Diana mourned by millions of people. However the cults mentioned above are restricted to a

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<sup>32</sup> R.Caillois, *op.cit.*

<sup>33</sup> J.M. Jeleu, *Le fascisme. État totalitaire*, Paris 1993, p. 110.

<sup>34</sup> E.&J.-P. Champseix, *L’Albanie ou la logique du désespoir*, Paris 1992, p. 85.

<sup>35</sup> See: G.Segré, *Le culte Presley*, Paris 2003.

relatively small number of believers (e.g. fans of Elvis), or don't last for a long time: mass culture is a reality of "one day heroes"<sup>36</sup>.

The real personality cult lasting for sixty years without any interruption and doubt is possible only in as totally isolated country as North Korea is. Only when the windows to the world open, will everybody see how strange and ridiculous was the religion he professed.

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<sup>36</sup> *La fabrique des héros*, ed. D.Fabre, Paris 1998, p. 308.