

Téma: *Náboženství a etnicita*

It is worth recalling first the very different factors and hypotheses from which a comparative analysis of the patterns of ethnic survival can depart. The ones usually highlighted are political in nature: the degree of a community's autonomy, its political will to survive and its leadership qualities. Sometimes analysis will focus on economic and ecological variables; the possession of specific homelands, their location, extent and population, and the presence of various material resources, facilities and skills for the support of a community. Yet another set of hypotheses treats ethnies as networks of communication, and seeks to ascertain how customs, language and other symbolic codes bind the members of communities together over generations.

Each of these approaches, and the hypotheses that derive from them, can make valuable contributions to the study of ethnic survival, and they merit further intensive comparative investigations. It is worth remembering, however, that ethnic communities can, and have, survived over long periods without political autonomy, without a homeland of their own, even without a common language-as the linguistic divisions in Switzerland remind us though this is rare. In such cases, other social and psychological factors appear to compensate for these absences.

This suggests that we need to pay more attention to the subjective elements in ethnic survival, such as ethnic memories, values, symbols, myths and traditions. The reason is that long-term ethnic survival depends, in the first place, on the active cultivation by specialists and others of a heightened sense of collective distinctiveness and mission. The members of an ethnic community must be made to feel, not only that they form a single 'superfamily', but that their historic community is unique, that they possess what Max Weber called 'irreplaceable culture values', that their heritage must be preserved against inner corruption and external control, and that the community has a sacred duty to extend its culture values to outsiders. Persians, Armenians, Poles, Russians, Chinese, Koreans, Japanese, Americans, Irish, English and French, to name but a few, have all cultivated this sense of uniqueness and mission by nurturing ethnic values and traditions, through myths of distant origins and symbols and memories of a golden age of former glory.

We can go further. Myths of common ancestry and memories of a golden age may unite and inspire the members of an ethnic community over several generations. Yet what is even more important for ethnic survival is to cultivate a myth of ethnic election. Those communities that managed to formulate and cultivate such a belief have succeeded in prolonging the specific collective life of their members over many generations. The creation and dissemination by specialists of the belief that 'we are a "chosen people"', has been crucial for ensuring long-term ethnic survival. A myth of ethnic election should not be equated with plain ethnocentrism.

Ethnic communities have quite commonly regarded themselves as the moral centre of the universe and as far as possible affected to ignore or despise those around

them. A myth of ethnic election is more demanding. To be chosen is to be placed under moral obligations. One is chosen on condition that one observes certain moral, ritual and legal codes, and only for as long as one continues to do so. The privilege of election is accorded only to those who are sanctified, whose life-style is an expression of sacred values. The benefits of election are reserved for those who fulfil the required observances. The classical expression of such beliefs among the ancient Israelites is to be found in the book of Exodus (ch. 19):

Now therefore if ye will obey my voice indeed and keep my covenant, then shall ye be a peculiar treasure unto me from all peoples; for all the earth is mine; and ye shall be unto me a kingdom of priests and an holy nation (Exodus 19:5-0; cf. Deuteronomy 7:6-13 and 10:12-22).

The covenant here refers to a code of morality, law and ritual, set out in detail in the book of Deuteronomy, which the Israelites must observe if they are to remain chosen and redeemed by God. Only by keeping these laws and ceremonies can the community and its members be saved.

Election myth in the Middle East and Europe

Even in antiquity, the Jews were by no means the only people to have believed that they were 'chosen'. Intimations of such ideas can be found over a millennium earlier in ancient Egypt and Mesopotamia. In the lands of Sumer and Akkad (now southern Iraq), the scattered city-states, while prizing their independence, acknowledged their ethnic kinship, particularly in times of crisis. The kings of one or other of the city-states united the Sumerians periodically, while worship of Enlil, chief god of the Sumerian pantheon, at his shrine in Nippur, acted as a religious focus for the Sumerian city-states. During the Sumerian revival under the Third Dynasty of Ur in the late third millennium Be, a greater sense of common ethnicity found expression in nostalgia for an earlier Sumerian golden age. Yet the sense of ethnic election was muted and indirect. It was vested in the king, as Enlil's representative on earth, and it was through kingship that any covenant between the gods and the community was mediated.

Ethnocentrism was more marked in ancient Egypt. The land of Ptah was compact, united and more homogeneous than the lands of Sumer and Akkad. There was greater emphasis on divine election of the 'god-king', notably in the political propaganda of New Kingdom Pharaohs like Tuthmosis III, Hatshepsut and Horemhab.⁵ There was correspondingly less stress on the community's election, with or without moral conditions. At the same time, the characteristic Egyptian sense of cultural superiority to aliens, those who lived outside 'the land' (of Egypt), was accentuated after the Theban Pharaohs had driven out the Asiatic Hyksos dynasty in the sixteenth century Be. Once again, however, the sense of election rose and fell with the monarchy and the state, though it lingered on into hellenistic and Roman epochs.

We cannot be sure, but a clear-cut theology of communal election in the ancient world seems to have originated in ancient Israel, though the forms of that relationship owed much to Near Eastern, especially Hittite, models. The central Israelite belief was that the sole God, the Lord of the universe, is working out His purpose for all His creatures, and has chosen a particular people to bring salvation to humanity. God's favour, however, is conditional on the fulfillment by the chosen of detailed moral and ritual codes. 'You only have I known of all the families of the earth; therefore I will punish you for all your iniquities'. Amos's prophetic judgement is unequivocal? Later prophets, responding to the social and geopolitical position of Israel, hemmed in between

Egypt and Assyria, elaborated on the moral dimensions of divine election. God's promise to Abraham that 'in thee shall all the families of the earth be blessed' is transformed by the Second Isaiah into the belief that Israel, the suffering servant, is chastised in order to bring salvation to all peoples. God uses Israel's enemies, the Assyrians and Babylonians, to redeem a purified Israel and thereby the world; while the Exodus from Egypt and the Covenant at Sinai are part of God's redemptive plan for humanity as a whole.

Such a conception imposes a heavy burden on the chosen. They are continually required to live up to strict moral standards. Backslidings are liable to severe punishment. This affords great scope for prophets, judges, sages and other moral crusaders to warn their kinsmen and thereby periodically to reaffirm the distinctive qualities and unique destiny of the community. Later, this close relationship with God, with its inescapable moral demands on the community, became the social and psychological mainspring of Jewish survival in their long diaspora.

Ideas of ethnic election, dynastic and communal, can be found among several other peoples of the ancient Near East. Here I can only mention a few. Among the Persians, the belief in ethnic chosenness has surfaced in various guises during their long history. The great Achaemenid kings, Cyrus and Darius, inherited the idea of the monarch's divine election from earlier empires and reserved for themselves the characteristic virtues of the Medes and Persians: truth, order and justice. Cyrus records how he 'constantly sought after order and equity for the black-headed people [of Babylon]' whom Marduk made him conquer; while Darius's rock inscriptions at Behistun emphasize the wisdom of living according to the precepts of the great Persian god, Ahura-Mazda, and dwell on the special mission of a Persian king to his many subjects.

Such themes were taken up much later by the Sassanid Persian rulers of Iran. The Zoroastrian temple religion was encouraged, and in the sixth century AD Chosroes I instigated a revival of old Persian symbols, myths and rituals. To this period, too, we can trace the origins of the Book of Lord.5, which recorded the exploits of the great Persian aristocratic families, chosen warriors defending Iran against the land of Tur'an. Though the Zoroastrian state religion ultimately failed to mould the Persians into a moral community, it did help to instill a sense of unique identity and destiny, which laid the basis for the New Persian cultural renaissance.

Much later, under the Safavid dynasty in the sixteenth century, the adoption of Islamic Shi'ite beliefs gave a new moral dimension to Persian identity. The present century has seen a fervent renewal of Shi'ite national-religious community and missionary destiny-in contrast to the abortive attempts of the Pahlavis to recreate ancient Aryan imperial traditions.

Further west, a powerful myth of election emerged in the mountain kingdom of Armenia after its conversion to Orthodox Christianity by St. Gregory in AD 301. The Romans and Byzantines contended for several centuries with the Persian Sassanid monarchs for control of Armenia, which finally lost its chance of independence after the disastrous battle of Avarayr in AD 451, despite a brief revival under the Bagratids in the ninth century. In this respect, Armenia resembled the Judean kingdoms, from which its rulers and nobles claimed descent. Both stood at the strategic crossroads of warring empires, and both peoples were spurred by political adversity to form a moral community and reinterpret their historical destinies in spiritual terms. The growing theological rift with Byzantine Orthodoxy, especially after the Council of Divin (AD 554), and Armenian pride in being the 'first Christian nation', cemented their belief in

ethnic election and divine mission, a belief that the Armenian clergy nurtured throughout the Armenian diaspora.

Yet another Christian realm whose legitimacy rested on a dynastic myth of election was the Ethiopian kingdom of Aksum and its successors. The Aksumite kings may have adopted their Monophysite form of Christianity in the fourth century from Coptic sources, but it retained many Judaic features, brought perhaps from the southern Arab kingdoms. Successive Ethiopian kingdoms on the Abyssinian plateau derived their legitimacy from the symbolism of the Lion of Judah and the claim to royal descent from Solomon and the Queen of Sheba through Menelik. In the so-called 'Solomonic' dynasty from the thirteenth century, the ruling Christian Amhara nobles began to participate in this royal myth of election, which inspired a cultural revival and mobilized the community for resistance to Muslim invaders and the Falashas.

We need not dwell at length on the powerful myths of election that have surfaced periodically among the Arabs and their kingdoms, notably during the Islamic conquests and in the period of the Crusades. The fact that Islam, like Christianity, is a world-religion, has not prevented the emergence of narrower ethnic myths within its domain. In some ways, Islamic allegiance has added a crusading fervor. Particularly among the Arabs, it has stimulated a pride in their language, culture and achievements and a sense of election and collective destiny that continue to exert a powerful influence on Middle Eastern politics to this day.

Myths of election also helped to sustain ethnic communities in Europe.

The ancient Greek encounter with the Persian empire had produced a heightened ethnocentrism, a sense of moral and cultural superiority to the surrounding 'barbarians', even a pan-Hellenic ideology-though, unlike the foundation myths of the Romans, it never succeeded in uniting the Greek city-states into a moral or political community. Only after the adoption of Orthodox Christianity in the Roman East, did Hellenism gradually acquire a moral dimension. The Byzantine Christian ideal was essentially dynastic and universal; yet it slowly became centred on the Greek-speaking inhabitants of an empire which by the ninth century had lost its western and eastern provinces, and which came to adopt Greek as its language of state in place of Latin and foster a classical Greek revival.¹⁶ Much later, especially after the Crusader sack of Constantinople in AD 1204, a defensive Byzantine Hellenic population became even more convinced of its elective status and imperial mission-as if the destiny of the world hung on the correct liturgical observance of the only true Christian doctrine in the only genuine Christian empire.

When that empire was at last extinguished in AD 1453, the same dream found a home further north and fed the burgeoning imperial ambitions of the Muscovite Russian state. The realm of the Russian Tsars became the sole bastion of Orthodoxy in an heretical world, the Third Rome, proclaimed by the Orthodox Russian clergy in the early sixteenth century. In the words of one of their leaders, Joseph of Volokolamsk monastery: 'In piety, the Russian land now surpasses all others'. From Ivan the Terrible on, the Tsar was elevated into a redeemer-figure, a 'father' to his chosen people in holy 'mother Russia'. By the nineteenth century, Slavophiles came to regard the Russian peasant community as the repository of truth, purity and wisdom-a religious conception that fed Tolstoyan and populist ideals and one that persists to this day in the writings of some neo-Russian nationalists.¹⁵

Similar myths can be found further west. They emerged, for example, in the Frankish kingdom in the eighth century, which the reigning Pope Paul likened to a 'new

kingdom of David', occupying a place like that of the people of Israel. Similar language was used much later by Pope Boniface at the end of the thirteenth century, when he stated that '... the kingdom of France is a peculiar people chosen by the Lord to carry out the orders of heaven'-a status and mission that Joan of Arc, and many French leaders after her, have fought to retain and execute.¹⁹

Similar beliefs could be found in contemporary Scotland, in the language of the Declaration of Arbroath of 1320, in the growing sense of Swiss Confederation from 1291, among the defeated Welsh and Irish, in Hussite Bohemia, in Elizabethan England, in Calvinist Holland and, across the ocean, in the American colonies and Catholic Mexico.

In all these instances, myths of ethnic election have helped to mobilize communities and ensure their survival over long periods. Because the ethnic myth is a dramatic tale that links the present with a communal past, and one that is widely believed, it helps to draw the members into a distinctive community, conferring on them a special aura, that of 'the elect'. Through its symbolism, it strives to unify different classes and regions, spreading ethnic culture outwards from the urban centres and the specialist strata, who guard the traditions, thereby creating a more participant society.

Myths of ethnic election may also strengthen a community's attachment to its historic territory. By regarding the homeland as God-given, it ties the elect to a particular terrain. Only the sacred land and the sanctified soil are fit for the elect, and they can only be redeemed in the land where their fathers and mothers lived, their heroes fought and their saints prayed. To be worthy of forefathers who laid down their lives in these holy mountains and by the banks of these sacred rivers, must we not return to the ancient virtues and foaken ways? The Swiss, who recall the heroism of Sempach and Morgarten, who extol the shining purity of the Jungfrau, who to this day re-enact the drama of William Tell, have they not converted an egalitarian myth of chosenness into the basis of their state and society, the condition of their continued freedom and prosperity?

Finally, myths of ethnic election can incite a community to expansion and war. The conviction of possessing the only true faith, and a higher morality and civilization, has inspired and justified many a missionary movement and imperialist drive to those who 'live in darkness' -be it medieval Armenians seeking converts in the Caucasus, Arabs engaged in righteous jihad, or Western nations imposing white 'civilization' on Asians and Africans.^{2.3}

Patterns of ethnic survival

In pre-modern eras, myths of ethnic chosenness spread to most areas of the world: to the Americas, Southern Asia, the Far East and Africa, as well as to Europe and the Middle East. Yet the belief in ethnic election has operated in different ways. Here I shall briefly distinguish four patterns of ethnic persistence and four ways in which myths of election help to sustain ethnic communities.

I call the first pattern imperial-dynastic. The myth of election is attached to the ruling house and dynasty, from which the community tends to take its main symbols and culture, and with which it is always associated. Thus, the Norman myths, within Normandy, were elaborated by clerics and chroniclers around the exploits of the ruling dukes from Rollo in AD 913 onwards. The chroniclers assumed that the Norman community shared in the special status and glory of its ruling house as a regnum, a kingdom of common customs and descent.

This conjunction of dynasty, land and people was repeated on a grander scale in the later Western kingdoms of France, England and Spain. In all three, myths of election centred on the ruling house, with coronation and anointing ceremonies underlining the semi-divine status of the monarch. Over the centuries the kingdom and its people came to share in this elective status, as John of Gaunt's eulogy of England, 'This other Eden, demi-paradise'. reminds us; until the point where the people themselves become the elect as citizens of a modern nation.^{2.5} Poland illustrates clearly this process of transfer. In the medieval and Renaissance periods, the Polish myth of election was attached to the kingdom and its Catholic rulers. With the decline of the dynasty and the dissolution of the state in the late-eighteenth century, the people gradually became the focus of collective redemption. Sections of the nineteenth-century Polish intelligentsia, notably the great poet Adam Mickiewicz, interpreted Poland's role as that of a 'suffering Christ' among the nations, soon to rise again-while the Polish Catholic Church remained sufficiently close to the people to furnish an ethnic resource into this century. So, Poland avoided the fate of those aristocratic ethnies, where royal defeat and destruction of the state entailed the demise of the community itself, as occurred in Burgundy or ancient Assyria; instead, Poland was transformed after 1918 into a citizen-nation.

A second pattern of ethnic survival, the communal-demotic, attaches the myth directly to the people in their sacred land. In these cases the community has usually been conquered and is struggling to preserve its former rights and way of life, claiming that its members are the original inhabitants and their culture is the vernacular. That was the claim of Celtic communities in Wales and Ireland. The Welsh myth of election pictured the community as the lost tribes of Israel, a latter-day chosen people, whose original form of Christianity had been transplanted to ancient Britain by Joseph of Arimathea. Together with the Welsh language, folk poetry and the medieval bardic contests, these beliefs helped to nurture a sense of unique Welsh identity, especially after the English conquest and the incorporation of Wales.^{2.7}

Ireland exhibited a similar mixture of pagan and Christian motifs in its election myths. The Irish 'golden age' was variously located in the pagan Celtic era of the High Kings of Tara, and the heroes of the Ulster cycle of ancient sagas; or in the great epoch of Irish monastic learning, art and missionary activity after St Patrick's conversion of Ireland in the fifth century. The latter period, especially, furnished rich materials for later Irish myths of election, as literary scholars, archaeologists and poets in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries envisaged the national restoration of an original Irish community in its insula sacra, its sacred island home.

The third pattern is that of the emigrant colonist. Again the myth is attached to the people; but this time to a people on the move. They have left or fled their old homelands and are bent on building new communities in . new homelands, often with little regard for the indigenous inhabitants. The elect are the immigrants and their descendants. Theirs is a settler community and mission. They carry with them their values, memories and traditions, regarding themselves as chosen by God for a providential destiny that will abolish the old order and inaugurate a new society.

The prototype here is the biblical exodus of the children of Israel from Egypt across the Red Sea. It has served as a model of their destiny for Anglo Saxon tribes crossing the Channel into Britain, after the Roman legions had been withdrawn, the land of milk and honey being replaced by England's green and pleasant land Many centuries later another crossing, this time of an ocean by the Pilgrim Fathers fleeing

religious oppression, became part of the foundation charter of the new American homeland, with its promise of freedom in a new Jerusalem.

A final pattern, that of diaspora-restoration, also attached the myth of election to a community on the move; only this time it was to one moving in a reverse direction, back to the old homeland. The return of the community to its ancestral home from which it had been exiled became the precondition of collective redemption. Zionism is the classic instance, with its secular fulfilment of ancient Jewish religious aspirations. Yet we meet the same pattern among Armenians yearning to return to Mount Ararat, among eighteenth-century diaspora Greeks longing for a restoration of Hellas, among Liberians and other Black Americans intent on returning to Africa, and latterly among some communities deported by Stalin to distant parts of the Soviet Union. In each of these cases, as the great Greek educator, Adamantios Korais, so clearly realized, the restoration of a diaspora to its ancestral home involved not merely the physical return of a people, but also its spiritual regeneration through education and political mobilization.

These four patterns of ethnic persistence and renewal do not pretend to be exhaustive. However, they reveal the importance of beliefs in chosenness for ethnic survival. They also show the different ways in which such beliefs operate. Sometimes they fuel expansion, sometimes popular revolt, at still other times mass migration and movements of restoration. They also expose the community to different risks: the ossification of the ethnic community through overdependence on the state, popular instability and extremism, dissipation of communal energy through schism or assimilation. These dangers are familiar to ethnic leaders. In each generation priests, scribes, prophets, bards, mandarins, even nobles, have warned the people of these dangers and by prescribing remedies for communal ills have actively cultivated the sense of ethnic identity and destiny.

Each of these patterns also reveals certain key factors in ethnic survival. Warfare and a warrior ethos are generally prominent in the dynastic-imperial pattern. The elect consist of righteous warriors under their redeemer-princes and faithful caliphs, and ethnic chosenness is borne on the spears and shields of missionary knights such as the Hungarian or Catalan nobility. As with the battles of the ancient Israelites against the Philistines, memories of victory and defeat became incorporated into the sacred history of a chosen people and its warrior-deity.

Popular revolt stands at the heart of the communal-demotic pattern. Theirs is no simple fate of passive endurance, but rather the ideal of a purified people, mobilized in defence of its heritage. Vernacular mobilization is the leitmotiv of survival among Irish and Basques, Czechs and Georgians, Kurds and Sikhs, and many more communities that have drawn on their native languages, traditions, symbols and memories for comfort and inspiration.

Wandering has become the dominant theme of both emigrant and diaspora patterns. For the first, it is a migration to the Promised Land, with a providential destiny that excludes indigenous peoples and slaves. For the diaspora type, long exile evokes a fervent nostalgia, an ardent desire to recover an original home exclusive to the chosen community.

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