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Protestantism in the Czech historical narrative and Czech nationalism of the nineteenth century

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A number of the leading figures of nineteenth-century Czech nationalism were Protestant, either by upbringing (Kollár, Safarík, Palacký) or by conversion (Masaryk). Another Protestant – the French historian, Ernest Denis – became the leading national historian after Palacký. They opposed the Czech 'genius' to the Austrian 'genius', defining the latter in terms of Catholicism and the former in terms of Hussism, and portraying Hussism as the first expression of the typically Czech aspiration to a freedom of the spirit and of the people. This prominence of Protestants happened at a time when Protestants represented only 2.3% of Czechs. Bohemia poses, therefore, the same enigma as France of the Third Republic: how could two countries almost entirely Catholic allow historians and statesmen favourable to Protestantism (re-)write the national narrative and set in motion a process of laicisation? The answer lies in the fact that in each case the adversary to a modernisation ardently sought (in the form of Third Republic in France and national independence in Bohemia) was conceived as fundamentally Catholic.

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In the history of states and nationalisms of the nineteenth and twentieth centuries, the powerful links between religion and nation are well-known. There have been many national religions (or 'established' religions, to use a term employed by the Protestants), but also, and more importantly, many *religious nations*, defined either by affinity or confusion between belonging to a religion and belonging to a nation. The religion in question was Protestantism in the case of Germany, the Nordic countries, England, the United States; the Orthodox Church in the case of Russia, Greece, Bulgaria, Serbia; and Catholicism in the case of Poland, Slovakia, Croatia, Quebec, Ireland, Spain (at least according to Francoism) and France (at least according to Maurras). Yet the cases of the last three cited, as for Italy or Belgium, show that things can be much more complex.

There were Protestants in the front rank of early Irish nationalism, people like Charles Stewart Parnell, Wolfe Tone or Douglas Hyde, the pastor's son and founder of the Gaelic League in 1893. In several of the principal Catholic states, the modern nation was able to construct itself either without or against the old state religion. This was also the case in the Italy of the Risorgimento and the Kingdom of 1861, and perhaps in Belgium after 1830, as well as in the France of the Revolution and

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above all the Third Republic, which produced a powerful synthesis between patriotism and secularism. The European ideal-type – as seen in Poland or under Bismarck – that presupposes a complete overlapping of nation and Christian religion thus had several major exceptions. We could, in fact, propose a second ideal-type, often characteristic of Catholic countries, through which the nation as 'civic religion' (sometimes complete with Genesis, crucified messiahs, sacred books, temples and rituals) was constructed in more or less open opposition to the revealed faith.

This article deals with a third case, perhaps a unique exception: that of Bohemia and its conception of nationhood in the nineteenth century. The surprising paradox lies in the extraordinary position that Protestantism held within this region on two occasions, although the Czechs of the time were 96% Catholic. Why were there so many Protestants among the é*veilleurs* of Czech nationalism? And why was such importance accorded to Hussism and the Reformation in the national historical narrative that was elaborated to become the core of the Republic of Tomás Masaryk, the philosopher-president who was himself a converted Protestant or rather Protestant supporter? It would seem that we are witnessing a truly unique historical event.

Yet the French Third Republic offers a curiously similar experience. In a country which was 98% Catholic, secularism was established against the will of the dominant Church. Moreover, this was accomplished by a generation raised on the historical writings of Michelet and Quinet, men who admired the Reformation as a precursor to the Republic. At the heart of this Republic, Protestants – whether by birth (the pedagogue/teacher Buisson) or by conversion (the philosopher Renouvier) – played a major role. The friendships between French and Czech intellectuals and leaders, between these two democracies just after 1918 and until the treason of Munich (1938), can be explained perhaps by these affinities in their historical experiences. Is it possible to distinguish here a minor ideal-type in which the concept of modernity, both nationalising and secularising, is owed, against all expectations, to a miniscule Protestant minority (around 2% at the time in the Czech regions as well as in France)?

It appears that we can, on the condition that we re-place it within its context: this eminent role played by Protestants, in the representation of the past as well as in their actions at the time, was only possible at precise moments and was not to reoccur. For both France and the Czech regions, this meant breaking free from Catholicism and from its openly stated internationalist dimension and its allegiances to a foreign spiritual capital – a break that other nations had accomplished in earlier periods in the religious domain through the Reformation. The Germanic Lutheran world had done this, going so far as to equate Lutheranism with German nationalism in the nineteenth century, and to the point, just after 1870, of launching the *Kulturkampf* – in other words, anti-Catholicism in the name of the nation.

In France of the 19th century, the diagnosis is fairly similar, but the medicine different: although Catholicism ended up discrediting itself by allying with the Jesuits, an international order, and with Rome and its leader (this was the whole issue of Ultramontanism, before as well as after the Vatican Council in 1870), it was no longer the time for a collective conversion like during the Reformation. Yet some leading thinkers, like Quinet or Renouvier, called for exactly that, and a part of the intellectual elite (such as Renan) insisted on raising their children as Protestants. The solution France adopted in the 1880s was a kind of secularism without materialism,

a spiritualist secularism to which Protestants (by origin or conversion) added their liberal conception of religion, as well as furnishing leaders and mid-level managers. It was in this sense that we can speak about a sort of republican Protestantisation of France, as was 'clearly' seen by Maurras and the entire anti-protestant current of thought through their phantasmagorical lenses – something forgotten today, but well deserves to be taken seriously.

As for the situation in the Czech regions, whether it worsened or became simplified, depending upon your perspective, it was because of the fact that the empire and master of their destinies, Austria, was the shining example of a *Roman* Catholic power. I emphasise this adjective since it represented a particular handicap (like *ultramontane*) in this century, which witnessed the affirmation of young and necessarily volatile nations. As a result, Czech nationalism, which was anti-Austrian, could hardly avoid engaging in anti-clericalism and even a genuine anti-Catholicism. Yet at the same time, its Slovak neighbour, to whom it was not yet linked by a hyphen, had to forge and defend itself against a powerful and almost aggressive policy of Magyarisation, led by a centre whose elites (in Budapest just after the Agreement of 1867) were principally Calvinist and Jewish.

This strange inverted symmetry for these two peoples, equally Catholic at the beginning, who ended up forming Czechoslovakia (and dissolving it twice in hardly more than a half-century), explains why the Slovaks had fully Catholicised their identity, and that the Czechs had, on the other hand, de-Catholicised and secularised it. They even Protestantised it in part, since the tragic saga of Hus and his heirs offered them a very satisfying national saga before the nation even existed. I should add, however, that once Austria was defeated, and French Catholicism had been separated – by forceps when necessary – from the state, the schools and public opinion, Protestantism and Protestants lost almost entirely their social and historical usefulness. Both France and Czechoslovakia (then the Czech Republic) became, in the twentieth century, examples of simply secular countries, which then turned into a sort of secularism without spiritualism, contrary to the generation of Renouvier and Masaryk. Yet over time they experienced several varieties of materialism: Combism (the anti-clericalism of Emile Combes), radicalism and consumerism in the French case; Marxism, then consumerism in the Czech case.

The moment that interests us here, however, is the one at which a new nation (Czech) and a new regime (the Republic in France) broke free from Catholicism in order to come into existence and had the 'luck' to find at their disposition groups of elites who were incredibly small minorities, but marvellously well-situated to be able to propose a new narrative and ideology. Michelet was the man of this narrative for France; Palacký, then his successor Denis, for the Czechs. Renouvier was the person of this ideology for France; Masaryk for the Czechs. Yet, in this list there are only two Protestants by birth – Palacký and Denis – while Renouvier and Masaryk had converted. Michelet was, of course, nothing of the kind, but including the man who had praised the Protestant martyrs of the sixteenth century as pioneers of revolutionary France does not weaken the argument – in fact, quite the contrary. What is important here is to see that at a crucial moment in their histories, two Catholic peoples were able to appropriate to themselves concepts built around a Protestant idea of their destiny – whatever the origins of the individuals promoting this idea.

The place of Protestants in the national awakening of the Czech regions in the nineteenth century

Let us recall the statistics. France counted 2.35% of the population as Protestant before the loss of Alsace-Lorraine, and around 1.6% after 1870 (the latter figure consisted primarily of the Reformed Church, or Calvinists); Bohemia and Moravia had, in 1890, 2.3% Protestants (both Reformed, who were primarily Czechs, and Lutherans, who were primarily Germans) in addition to 96% Catholics and 1.5% Jews (Ducreux, 1990). Could such a small group indicate the direction to follow for an entire people? That is what seems to have happened, if we believe Masaryk himself, in a book he wrote near the end of his life assessing what had occurred:

> Can it be an accident that three of the chief leaders of our renascence were Protestants? Besides Palacký, there were Kollár and Safarík, both of them Slovaks and Protestants, who took our Reformation as their starting-point. ... The decisive fact is that he [Kollár] too was a Protestant and that both felt themselves to be children of the Reformation, ecclesiastically and religiously. (Masaryk, 1927, p. 429)

While his statement does correspond to a certain reality, it is incomplete: other leaders of the Czech renaissance were of Catholic origin, and some were even priests (who did not follow, of course, the Church's position) like Josef Dobrovský (1753–1829) and Augustin Smetana (1814–1851). Masaryk thus made a choice in mentioning only these three Protestant 'Fathers' of the national renaissance. They were the Slovaks Jan Kollár, author of the famous national poem *Slávy dcera (The Daughter of Sláva)* in 1824, and Josef Safarík (1795–1861), who became the first great scholar of the Czech language and author of *Slovanské starožitnosti* (*Slavonic Antiquities*), (1836–1837). Both were Lutherans, former students of the Lutheran Secondary School of Presbourg (Bratislava), who had come to Prague to place themselves at the service of the Czech cause.

The central figure, however, is that of the Moravian Frantisek Palacký (1798–1876), a direct descendant of the Moravian Brothers, the heirs of Hussism. Promoter of the National Museum, creator of the first scientific journal in the Czech language (*Matice ceska*, 1830–1831), he wrote a monumental work, *A History of the 'Czechs' (also called 'Bohemians') from their origin, or rather from their first known history*, first in German (nine volumes from 1836 to 1867), then in Czech (ten volumes from 1848 to 1876).[1] The book ends at the defeat of White Mountain (1620), which signalled the end of Protestant Bohemia and the entry of the region into the 'era of darkness', according to the Czech expression of the nineteenth century – that is to say, under the influence of Catholic Austria. Palacký fully belonged to the category of historian-founders of a nation: it is the narrative that they provide of a nation that largely contributes to its (re-)creation after a long period of slumber (to use a metaphor of which nationalisms of the nineteenth and twentieth centuries were fond).

A striking aspect, in the case of the Czechs, is that the quasi-official successor of Palacký was a French graduate of the École Normale Supérieure and university scholar, Ernest Denis (1849–1921). In fact, Denis was revered to such a point that his name was given, after 1918, to one of the train stations in Prague – an honour shared only with Masaryk and Woodrow Wilson. In nearly 2,500 pages and 25 years of work, this historian presented the history of Hus (*Hus et la guerre des Hussites*, 1878), then of Bohemia until the episode of White Mountain (*Fin de l'indépendance*

bohême, 2 vols, 1890) to the French public. Most importantly, he continued his narrative until 1902, thereby filling a gap of nearly three centuries that Palacký had left open wide.

The two volumes of *La Bohême depuis la Montagne blanche* (1903) were very quickly translated into Czech, like the previous ones, and spread throughout the country thanks to inexpensive editions, which made this Frenchman the other classic historian of the Czech nation. Yet, one point merits attention: Ernest Denis was a Protestant from Nîmes, who, like Palacký, was heir to the living memory of a conquered but faithful minority, dispersed throughout Europe, but also rooted in their Cévennes mountains. The Slavist Louis Eisenmann underlined 'the irresistible affection which, from the beginning, had carried ... the descendant of the faithful of the Desert Churches towards the nation of Hus and the "fighters of God"'.[2]

We have here, it seems to me (and without neglecting the wounded patriotism of 1870 or the designation of Germany as a common adversary), the key to the 'bohemian' vocation of Denis – a vocation that had had other examples, both before him (the novelist Georges Sand[3]) and after (the pastor Charles Toureille[4]): an affinity, or even a feeling of kinship, of one religious minority for another – in this case, at the heart of the great European and North American family of Protestantisms and proto-Protestanisms.[5] Historians have not investigated sufficiently the question of these minority affinities. More specifically, we have today several works on Protestants (as a minority) *and* Jews (Yardeni, 1998; Cabanel, 2004b), on Jews *and* Armenians,[6] but very little on relationships within and among minority Protestant groups: French Huguenots, Hussite Czechs, Hungarian Calvinists, Italian Waldensians, Spanish Protestants, Irish Protestants, Scottish Cameronians. Only the more or less mythical, vertical filiations have been studied: from Cathars and Waldensians to Protestants. Yet, further research needs to be done, which goes beyond simple inter-religious relationships (such as the exchange of books, students, pastors or money) and which may have cultural, political, even diplomatic, implications, as we will soon see. Although the single Czech case addressed in the present article is not sufficient to build a general model, nevertheless it sketches out the contours of an original case that is both socially and historically significant.

The question of Masaryk himself remains to be addressed. He was Protestant not by birth, but as a result of his own personal development, at least in part under the influence of his spouse. In his interviews with Karel Capek (1936, pp. 16–7), Masaryk recalled his impressions as a Catholic child in southern Moravia, both troubled and fascinated at the same time by Protestants, wondering why people in his milieu recognised them as being 'more cultivated, more orderly and more thrifty'. Little by little, Masaryk, as a secondary school student at Brno (Moravia), distanced himself from Catholicism. He read *La Vie de Jésus* by Renan, which had been rapidly translated into Czech, and broke with the Church on the occasion of the Vatican Council and the proclamation of the infallibility of the Pope.

In 1877, as a student in Leipzig, he met a young American, Charlotte Garrigue (1850–1923), descendant on her mother's side from the Pilgrim Fathers and on her father's side from French Huguenots who had emigrated after the revocation of the Edict of Nantes. 'A father, son of the Huguenots, a mother of the lineage of the pioneers of the Far West ... what a tradition and moral energy that represented!' (Capek, 1936, pp. 16–7). The young couple were married by a pastor in a religious

ceremony. Charlotte was in fact a Unitarian, member of the most liberal (in the nineteenth-century sense of the term) fringe of Protestantism, more ethical than religious. Her intellectual and spiritual influence was of primary importance for the future president of Czechoslovakia. Did Masaryk owe his decision, in 1880, to join the Evangelical Reformed Church in southern Moravia, to her? However, he was never able or willing to fully belong to a religion of any kind, although he never stopped asserting that he was religious.

According to the French Slavic specialist, Daniel Essertier, founder of the *Revue française de Prague* and himself a Protestant of Waldensian origin, Masaryk had once thought about becoming a pastor. He soon gave up the idea, but 'whether he set himself the task of the spiritual regeneration of his people, or of forging for modern humanity the ideals without which it would not know how to live (two missions which are in fact but one), it was really a new sort of Gospel that he announced and preached with an admirable continuity, without taking on even the slightest airs of a prophet' (Essertier, 1930, p. 4).

We can recognise in him the portrait of a contemporary, the rather puritan President of the United States Woodrow Wilson. In fact, the parallels between the Society of Nations that the latter proposed and the creation of one of his best students, the Czechoslovakian Republic, are illuminating (Zorgbibe, 1998). Protestantism can be found along both men's paths in life, not in the doctrinal sense, but in the 'softest' sense: a sense of ethics, a humanitarianism. This is the Protestant mode of secularisation: little remains of the old Protestantism in the sense of religious orthodoxy, but quite a lot of the old Protestantism remains in the resistance to the materialist forms of secularisation sometimes found in Catholic countries. Masaryk, according to the historians Palacký and Denis, looked for the roots of Czech-style humanitarianism in Hussism, rather than in the Enlightenment, although it, too, was present in Prague – this is a universalism that speaks Czech.

The reinvention of Hussism and the repetition of history

The three men all concurred in making Jan Hus the father of the Czech nation. The two historians saw in Hus' destiny the metaphor of Bohemia's destiny. The martyr and his nation experienced, on a Christological model, affirmation, then the blossoming of an exemplary and precocious maturity, and finally, martyrdom, dispersion and clandestine existence, but also a tenacious memory and continuity, and promises of reparations to come. Palacký placed Hus at the heart of the process of Czech national affirmation, seeing in the religious reformer the father of the nation. 'Religious reform, the renaissance of Slavic nationality, these two events, so distinct, were however intimately linked, and careful observation reveals the connection', confirmed Denis (1890, vol. 1) in the preface of *La fin de l'indépendance bohême*, thus linking the nineteenth century to the fifteenth. This was, properly speaking, an historical *trompe d'oeil*, or even a naïve anachronism: he places the analyses of the nineteenth century, which were dominated by the question of nationhood, on the realities of the fifteenth, which were essentially theological. It is a bit as if one made Wycliffe the father of the English nation, or Calvin the father of Switzerland: it is possible to see things in this way, but at the price of confusion and a flattening of chronology that historians cannot accept. Historians have no difficulty

dismantling the ideological force of these kinds of reconstructions, as did Masaryk's critics, who were both respected historians and devout Catholics.

To tell the Czechs that they are the nation of Hus and that he is the Father of the nation is thus a false statement from a strictly historical point of view (the anachronisms are blatant), and even a religious contradiction since the supposed 'sons' of Hus were Catholics. Yet, it is a correct assertion if we speak, as Denis did, in terms of 'intimate union' and 'connection', with resonances to the 'affinity' of Max Weber. In the eyes of Palacký, Denis and Masaryk, beyond its core, which was strictly historical and above all theological (and whose severe vision of the world we can be sure none of the intellectuals cited here would have appreciated), Hussism contained elements that belonged to human experience in its universality: the assertion of the rights and demands of conscience, the struggle in the name of an ideal against a more powerful enemy, fidelity even at the price of exile. This is the meaning of the trilogy made famous by Palacký, then Denis, or even by the Protestant and nationalist novelist Alois Jirasek: Hus the reformer, Zizka the soldier and Comenius the pastor and pedagogue, who was destined to become the intellectual of the Hussite diaspora. In other words, it was less the letter than the spirit of the Hussite experience that Palacký placed at the centre of national history: the Czechs would be, in Central Europe, confronted with political and religious absolutisms, their people would be fighters (always) and martyrs (often) for liberty. There was here the risk of overstating the case based on pride, which, despite the Czechoslovak ideology to which Masaryk and Denis were so attached, ended up irritating the Slovaks and their Catholic leaders, as a certain French messianism had exasperated German nationalism (that of Herder and Fichte) at the end of the eighteenth century. This is what Denis (1915, pp. 67–8) wrote on the occasion of the five hundredth anniversary of Hus' death at the stake:

> Hus provided them [the Czechs] a reason to live, impressing on them the need to survive, because, thanks to him and through him, they became the representatives and the agents of a superior idea, the defeat of which would have been a set-back for all of humanity. . . . [Bohemia] reclaimed its independence, finally, because it had a particular role to play in the world, a role which it has proved for five centuries that it was worthy of holding completely and that, if its voice was snuffed out, a note would be missing in the concert of the civilised world.[7]

Masaryk (1927 pp. 428–9) had also insisted on this point. Still less than Denis, he did not reason as a historian but as a philosopher, concerned with finding the meaning of Czech history:

> In a word, Palacký's philosophy of our own and of world history is our best recommendation. From the beginning of the fourteenth to the end of the eighteenth century, the Czech question, the question of our existence, was in essence the question of religion and of humanity. . . . Palacký undoubtedly had a religious conception of the national humanitarian ideal. His whole philosophy of history proves it, as his opponents recognise; and his writings suffice fully to establish the religious basis of our humanitarian outlook.

Masaryk added that the religious dimension had been always present (cf. Ducreux, 1990, p. 112), and that those who reduce the Czech tradition to its national dimension, including those who did so during the time of Hussism, impoverish that tradition. Yet did the renaissance of the nineteeth century really have a religious

aspect? Masaryk responded affirmatively in adding to Palacký's theory that the Hussite religious movement contained something national, his own assertion: the Czech national movement contained something of the religious, but it was the continuation in the national sphere of a movement begun in the religious. The interweaving of the two spheres mutually legitimised them and validated the important theme of Czech continuity. The *Czech Question*, itself the title of a work by Masaryk, remained open: in the beginning religious, from the fourteenth to the sixteenth centuries it had become national, keeping all the while its religious roots. Even if, according to the philosopher, many of his contemporaries were only interested in problems of a national and social nature, 'anyone who looks in greater depth will see that [the Czech question] is also a moral, and thus religious, question' (cited in Michel, 1986, p. 105). Masaryk returned again and again to Hus, whether in the book he wrote about him in 1896 or in two important speeches he gave in 1910 in southern Bohemia and then in 1915 in Geneva:

> Why are we here, what do we want, what does the Reformation mean to us today? Are we here just to listen politely to a speaker – or are we troubled and stirred by Hus, is he still a living force in our lives? Did he die in vain, were the long, bloody Hussite wars in vain, were the bitter internal struggles in vain, the Reformation, the counter-reformation? . . . [To take into account the work of Hus] this means that *we must break our ties with Rome, not only in name, but in deed and spirit. We must overcome the Rome inside each one of us.* (Wellek, 1974, pp. 10, 13; emphasis added).

Is there any need to point out that 'to triumph over Rome within ourselves' has nothing historical about it, and that Masaryk, notwithstanding his scholarship, is nonetheless at the opposite extreme of scientific method and the historical sciences? Yet, this was also true of Denis, even though the latter was covered in university degrees and a contemporary of the *Revue Historique* of Gabriel Monod. It was easy for the true historians of the Czech regions to dismantle the mythical dimension of the narrative built by the two men. Indeed, we are not in fact very far from the quarrel between Max Weber and historians, with the former analysing at the level of the ideal type (the worldly asceticism of the Reformation and its capitalist transposition) and the latter at the level of facts and statistical series.

Masaryk found himself criticised by the great historian of the Charles University, the Catholic Josef Pekar, who had emphasised the importance of the Baroque golden age in Catholic Prague of the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries, estimating the period as fully 'Czech' as the Hussite resistance had been. For Pekar, if the Czech national consciousness was as linked to the Reformation as Masaryk thought, the Czechs would never, as a nation, have survived the Counter-Reformation. These arguments, which aroused very keen interest among Czech elites, were expressed in distinguished publications by Josef Pekar, including *O smyslu ceských dejin* (*On the Meaning of Czech History*) (1929).

From a strictly historical point of view, Pekar was right, as were the historians who pointed out that capitalism's first boom was in northern Italy, long before the Reformation. More precisely, Weber was reasoning not at the level of historical facts, but at the level of affinity that he believed he detected between an ethic that came from a religion and the spirit of capitalism. Both he and the historians were equally right, but at different levels. In the same way, Pekar's and Masaryk's reflections were not situated on the same scale: one was considering the reality of eighteenth-century Baroque Bohemia; the other, the Czech message and philosophy of history. The

historian Palacký did this in the manner of Michelet, his contemporary: the history of his country is that of an idea, an idea of universal scope, that awakens, then stumbles in the accidents of history, seems to disappear, then arises once again, resplendent. It is the Revolution for a French person, with its precursors in the sixteenth century; it is the Nation for a Czech, with its precursors in the fifteenth century. What did it matter that there were, between the two precursors and the present, periods as important as the 'Great Century' of Louis XIV or the century of Baroque Prague? The progress of the idea happened, as simply as that, it had just gone underground; or rather the idea was carried away and protected in the Hussite or Huguenot exile. No matter that Calvin had never thought to chase the princes from their thrones, or that the Hussite Tabor never proclaimed a Bohemian nation. They did it, but in their own way, differently. To the extent that the two republics, French and Czech, made the narratives of Michelet and Palacký their 'official' histories (in the best sense of the word: a collective myth, transposed and diffused through the schools and textbooks), we find ourselves standing, dumbfounded, before an incredible feat that promoted minority religious movements – conquered, crushed and some centuries old – to the role of heralds of democratic and national modernity. An astonishing revenge of history for the conquered, and a surprising humiliation, after the fact, for the Catholic majorities, dispossessed of their rights on the nation and its history.

The thought of Masaryk has been commented upon, closer to our times, by the great Czech philosopher Jan Patocka, who comes back to the debate over Czech history and the continuity that Palacký and Masaryk saw in it:

> We can understand continuation (1) as a conscious revival, or (2) as an analogous situation: to carry out 'the same thing' at two different epochs (that is, without being conscious of the relationship). In speaking of the 'continuation of the tradition of the Reformation,' Kaizl and Pekar thought more in the first manner, Masaryk in the second. The '*Eveilleurs*' did, once again, the same thing as the Reformation in the sense that they resisted a centralising conceptualisation of power, a concept that was objective, and total, resisting the Catholic system. They did so with the same rigorous ethic, with the same abnegation, with the same awareness of standing before the face of the absolute. It is in this way that the analogy exists between the national renaissance and the Reformation. But the first sense was not entirely absent either: it was Herder who rediscovered Comenius, and, through Herder, his readers also, Kollár, Safarík, and Palacký, entered into the same lineage. (Patocka, 1985, Vol. 2, p. 68)

It is in this way, in fact, that history can 'repeat itself', despite the heresy that professional historians see in this concept, not beginning again mechanically, but by analogy.[8] We find here, in fact, a notion familiar to those who work on the transformations of Jewish messianism (Löwy, 1988) or more broadly on modes of secularisation: when Carl Schmitt (1988), p. 46) writes that all the predominant concepts of the modern theory of the state are theological concepts that have been secularised, he provides us with the means to better understand the authentic intellectual process by which Hussism was proclaimed the basis of the Czech nation and nationalism. Concerning this subject, Masaryk (1927, pp. 437–8) states:

> Nowhere does the religious question nowadays imply the mere adoption of old ecclesiastical forms. . . . If we are to bridge the abyss of the Hapsburg Counter-Reformation and to establish links with our national Reformation, we must continue its tradition in harmony with the spiritual needs of our time. If it be said that the present

> generation no longer believes as Hus believed ... the answer is that though we no longer believe as Hus believed, he and his disciples are models of moral resolution, steadfastness and religious uprightness. ... In the spirit of these masters we must go forward and hand on their torch to future generations. ... The relationship of religion to political and practical life I sum up in the command that we should seek first the Kingdom of God and His righteousness and that all other things shall be added unto us. A man and a people religiously convinced, a nation steadfastly determined to realize its ideals, will always reach their goal. This I have learned from life; this too is the teaching of our own history and that of all nations. ... Our reformation was a democratic revolution against theocracy.

The parallel with French history between 1860 and 1880 is striking: several of the intellectual fathers of the Republic and secularism, who came from Protestantism, had the feeling of remaking in another, political, domain, the Reformation their country missed out on, in a religious way, in the sixteenth century. This was not to 'repeat' history, to undertake religious reform once again at the point at which it had earlier been interrupted by the violence of the state, but, *by analogy*, to pursue in another way, in a secular workshop, the same fundamental work that had formerly taken a religious character and present it henceforth as political. This fundamental work was understood, simply, as the pursuit of liberty. The Protestants found themselves fully at ease in this role, as comfortable in the historical narrative as in the modernising governments (Cabanel, 2003).

Conclusion

The Palacko-Masarykien model, nevertheless, created a risk for Czech identity: in Central Europe of the time, Protestantism meant Germanism. The movement *Los von Rom*, around 1900, aimed to make the Germans of Bohemia (massively Catholic, like their Czech neighbours with whom relations deteriorated because of nationalism) return to Lutheranism (Cabanel, 1999). The equation *Deutschtum = Lutherthum* risked rendering uncomfortable the one that Palacký had imposed: *Hussism = Czechness*. Masaryk (1927, pp. 431–2) realised the strength of the argument of some of his detractors:

> In their eyes, the Reformation was, and is, a religious and political mistake; the Catholicizing of our people by the Hapsburgs was its spiritual and national salvation; the Bohemian Brotherhood and Protestantism would have Germanized us; the Battle of the White Mountain was a blessing. ... Our Catholic opponents of the Czech Reformation ... are able to invoke the authority of Bismarck, who is said once to have spent a sleepless night in trying to imagine what the course of history might have been had the Protestants won the Battle of the White Mountain. Bismarck may have wondered whether a Protestant Bohemia would have associated herself with the Protestant policy of Prussia against Austria. Austria would thus have remained an unimportant German borderland while, with the help of Bohemia, the Germans would have been masters of the Danube and the dream of Berlin-Baghdad might have been fulfilled with Czech assistance.

Masaryk (1927, pp. 432–3) retorted that this argument of his critics excessively 'nationalised' the religious stakes of White Mountain episode.[9] Yet he went even further in adding that the Czech Reformation was a native phenomenon: the reason being that Hus owed nothing to Luther![10] As for the Counter-Reformation, it was imposed in Bohemia, *manu militari*, by a foreign dynasty with foreign forces, German (the Hapsburgs) or Italian (the Jesuits). The accusation of de-nationalisa-

tion was thus turned against Catholicism and the Vienna of the Hapsburgs, and the exceptionality of Czech history once again underscored:

> If, as I hold, Palacký's philosophy of our history is essentially true, the cleft between Church and culture has, in our case, peculiar national importance, an importance not solely philosophical and religious as in the case of other nations; it means that our Reformed church was suppressed by an alien dynasty with the assent of the Catholic church, and that the Hapsburg Counter-Reformation yawns as an abyss between the Reformation period and the present day. (Masaryk, 1927, p. 435)

These theories offered a relatively convincing and even familiar framework of analysis for the French Republican elites. Hapsburgs and Germanism could pass for common adversaries with which both Czechs and French had been confronted in their history. To what extent, therefore, did the historico-philosophical concept constituted by Palacký, Denis and Masaryk influence the destinies of Bohemia-Moravia and the support that France provided them during, and at the end of, the First World War? It would be presumptuous to claim that we could provide a definitive answer to such a complex question. Charles Maurras (1925) certainly did just that, with the sense for expressions – and for conspiracies – that characterised him:

> A Hussite passion for anti-Romans, a Bohemian passion, reigned undividedly in the heart and mind of Ernest Denis. The collapse of the Catholic monarchy was, for him, if I may say so, manna from heaven. But how were the politico-religious fantasies of Ernest Denis able to carry the day?

As for the very respectable historian François Fejtö (1993/1998), he concluded in his *Histoire de la destruction de l'Autriche-Hongrie* that there was a sort of plot between Masaryk, Benes the Freemason and the republican elites of their time. It is probably more prudent, and also more useful, to speak of influences, or correspondences (in the Baudelairean sense) or affinities (in the Weberian sense), that found their source in personal reference points, which were not always conscious or analysed.

Such kinds of correspondences came into play here between Hussism and nationalism through Palacký and Masaryk; they also came into play between French Huguenots and Czech Neo-Hussites around the astonishing figure of Ernest Denis, among others. The body of evidence might appear too thin on historical or diplomatic terms to generate a standard paradigm or model; it concerns, after all, only a few works, theories that were not even unanimously accepted among Czech academics, seen perhaps as dreams that might not always seem very serious. And yet, as we well know, nationalisms are made of dreams, fabrications and imaginations, whether in terms of territories, of the past, of languages or of definitions of self and other. The foundations of these myths and these pantheons might sometimes appear fragile, yet it was from them that very serious geopolitical plans were laid out and states were built, sometimes quite solidly. Of course, Czecho-Slovakia collapsed twice, in 1939–1940 and in 1993, most probably for the last time, but the 'Hussite' and nationalist association put in place by these three Protestants – the Hussite Palacký, the Huguenot Denis, and the convert Masaryk – nonetheless succeeded in bringing into existence a very interesting example of a secular republic in the heart of the twentieth century: something at the same time exceptional and yet closely linked to the French case. Today, although the communist dictatorship contaminated the Hussite reference by excessively exploiting it for its own ends, some observers see the demanding ethic proper to Masaryk (and to Comenius and Jean Hus before him)

breathe once again in the speeches of Vaclav Havel (Ducreux, 1990, p. 125). Perhaps the first Czech philosopher-president was right, and history does 'repeat itself', by analogy.

Notes

1. The work was translated into English in 1925.
2. *Revue Historique*, *135*, 1920, p. 368. Émile Haumant (1921, p. 664) noted that 'en Bohême, on ne manquait jamais de rappeler qu'il était né "huguenot", sans doute pour suggérer qu'en d'autres temps il aurait été hussite'.
3. After becoming a Protestant sympathiser, this novelist put Huguenots at centre stage in her writings: *Les beaux messieurs de Bois-Doré* and, in particular, a descendant of Hussites in *Consuelo*, *Jean Ziska*, *La Comtesse de Rudolstadt* and *Procope le Grand* (1842–1844).
4. In 1924, Toureille defended a thesis in theology entitled *Jean Hus ou les débuts de la crise religieuse actuelle de la Tchécoslovaquie*, before going on to manage a Protestant organisation linked to saving Czechs and Jews, starting in 1939 (see Zasloff, 2003).
5. On Denis, see Cabanel (2004a). Certain parts of the present article were taken from this chapter.
6. See the articles in *Ailleurs, hier, autrement: connaissance et reconnaissance du génocide des Arméniens, Revue d'histoire de la Shoah, 177–178*, 2003.
7. Compare the conclusion to Denis (1903, p. 2): 'Les Tchèques ne défendent pas leur seule cause, mais celle de l'Europe et celle de l'humanité entière, et leur défaite marquerait un retour offensif de la barbarie.'
8. See Patocka (1985, p. 63), who wrote: 'Non pas le fait de renouer avec ou d'adopter la tradition de la Réforme, comme le fait Masaryk, du moins pas exclusivement, mais la répétition d'une situation semblable à celle pour laquelle on avait déjà mené en Bohême un combat à la fois spirituel et social.'
9. 'The argument that the Czech defeat on the White Mountain was a national advantage is mistaken. It seeks to turn a religious into a racial question in order to appeal to patriotic sentiment. The Catholic historians and those non-Catholics who judge the Reformation solely as a strengthening of our national consciousness misunderstand the essence of religious feeling and the whole sense of our history.'
10. Faced with the same equation, Protestantism = Germanism, the French biographer of Calvin, Émile Doumergue (in seven volumes appearing from 1899 to 1927) tried to prove that the Reformation had its original roots in France with Lefèvre d'Étaples whose *Commentaire des Épîtres de saint Paul* date from 1512 – thus before Martin Luther.

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