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## **Kreatismus: A Failed Attempt to Establish a New Religion**

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## **MASTER'S THESIS**

**in Religious Studies:**

**Kreatismus:**

**A Failed Attempt to Establish a New Religion**

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# 1 Introduction

In his best-selling book *Grundlagen des neunzehnten Jahrhunderts* (1899), Houston Stewart Chamberlain, who was Richard Wagner's son-in-law, asserts: "That Christ had not a drop of genuinely Jewish blood in his veins [...] is almost a certainty."<sup>1</sup> The book was among the most influential ones published in the Wilhelmine Era. In the *Foundations*, Jews are presented as a negative force. While many Christians throughout the centuries displayed religiously motivated hatred toward their Jewish neighbors because their ancestors were said to be the killers of Christ,<sup>2</sup> some theologians were also uncomfortable with Christianity's Jewish roots and its dependence on the Old Testament.<sup>3</sup> Therefore, claims were made that Jesus' teachings had actually originated in Hellenism, Buddhism or Zoroastrianism.<sup>4</sup> Jesus' Jewishness was deemphasized and his words and deeds "were consistently interpreted as a critique of Judaism rather than an expression of it."<sup>5</sup> Moreover, arguments were put forward in support of the hypothesis that Jesus himself was *not* Jewish, but that he was actually "Aryan" instead.<sup>6</sup> Also non-theologians like Chamberlain participated in this discourse, as can be seen from the citation above.

The Aryan-Jesus movement culminated in the founding of the "Institute for the Study and Elimination of Jewish Influence on German Church Life" in Eisenach, colloquially referred to as *Entjudungsinstitut*, where hundreds of scholars put themselves to the task of draining Christianity of what was perceived as Jewish influence between 1939 and 1945. Dirk Schuster points out that the work of the institute served the purpose of legitimizing doctrinal changes such as the rejection of the Old Testament for the Protestant faith.<sup>7</sup> At least 200,000 copies of

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<sup>1</sup> Cited in Susannah Henschel, *The Aryan Jesus. Christian Theologians and the Bible in Nazi Germany*, 3rd edition (Princeton and Oxford: Princeton University Press, 2010), 42.

<sup>2</sup> Cf. Sipco Vellenga, "Anti-Semitism and Islamophobia in the Netherlands: Concepts, Developments, and Backdrops," *Journal of Contemporary Religion* 33, no. 2 (2018): 177; Hubert Mohr, "Remarks on 'The Jew' as a Social Myth and Some Theoretical Reflections on Anti-Semitism," in *Anti-Semitism, Paganism, Voelkish Religion*, ed. Hubert Cancik and Uwe Puschner (München: K. G. Saur, 2004), 3.

<sup>3</sup> See Henschel, *Aryan Jesus*, 27.

<sup>4</sup> See Henschel, *Aryan Jesus*, 27.

<sup>5</sup> Henschel, *Aryan Jesus*, 33.

<sup>6</sup> See Henschel, *Aryan Jesus*, 27.

<sup>7</sup> Dirk Schuster, "'Entjudung' als göttliche Aufgabe: die Kirchenbewegung Deutsche Christen und das Eisenacher Entjudungsinstitut im Kontext der nationalsozialistischen Politik gegen Juden," *Schweizerische Zeitschrift für Religions- und Kulturgeschichte* 106 (2012): 248.

a Bible version that was missing parts of the New Testament as well as the entire Old Testament were printed and disseminated during World War II.<sup>8</sup>

In short, the theologians attempting to “Aryanize” Jesus and the Bible deemed the “Jewish influence on German church life” problematic, while they affirmed the value of Jesus’ teachings. A very different approach was taken by some German neo-Nazis at the turn of the century. One of them was Dietrich Schuler. He even found it necessary to design a new religion from scratch which he named “Kreatismus.” Schuler wrote his first book on the topic, *Die Stunde des Kreatismus*, in 1993,<sup>9</sup> but it was not until 2003 when a new, shortened and updated version of his book, quickly followed by a second edition in 2004,<sup>10</sup> was printed and disseminated throughout the German neo-Nazi scene, that his ideas began to be known within the movement. The new version of the book bore the catchy title: *Jesus: Europas falscher Gott*.

Far from deemphasizing Jesus’s Jewishness, Schuler claims that the New Testament’s message was and continues to be detrimental for “Aryans.” In fact, he finds it far more problematic than the Old Testament.<sup>11</sup> Schuler calls for a shift of focus from blaming Marxism or “Cultural Marxism” for weakening the “Aryan race” toward the damnation of Christianity and New Testament ethics in particular, which he views as the root cause of these ideologies. Schuler was not the first neo-Nazi to criticize the ethics conveyed by the New Testament. Jürgen Rieger, a far-right politician, who led a neo-pagan organization called *Artgemeinschaft*, is a prominent example.<sup>12</sup> But the sentiment was largely popularized through the writings of

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<sup>8</sup> See Oliver Arnhold, *“Entjudung” – Kirche am Abgrund*, vol. 2: *Das “Institut zur Erforschung und Beseitigung des jüdischen Einflusses auf das deutsche kirchliche Leben” 1939-1945* (Berlin: Institut Kirche und Judentum, 2010), 680f. There had been prior attempts to rid parts of the New Testaments from Jews and Hebrew words in the 1930s. See Arnhold, *Kirche am Abgrund*, 249, footnote 33.

<sup>9</sup> Dietrich Schuler, *Die Stunde des Kreatismus* (Birkenfeld: Selbstverlag 1993).

<sup>10</sup> Dietrich Schuler, *Jesus: Europas falscher Gott*, 2<sup>nd</sup> shortened, updated edition (Ellwangen: Volk in Bewegung Verlag & Medien, 2004).

<sup>11</sup> The main authoritative figure he evokes in all his books and articles is, of course, Friedrich Nietzsche. As is well-known, Nietzsche wrote a pamphlet titled *Der Antichrist*. I will not concern myself with Friedrich Nietzsche’s philosophy in this thesis, as countless scholars have done so before.

<sup>12</sup> See Jürgen Rieger, *Von der christlichen Moral zu einer biologisch begründeten Ethik* (Hamburg: Verlag der Artgemeinschaft, 1989). Jürgen Rieger led the “Artgemeinschaft,” a German neo-pagan organization that was founded by Wilhelm Kusserow in the 1950s, from 1989 to 2009. Kusserow had been briefly active in the German Faith Movement (*Deutsche Glaubensgemeinschaft*), a religious movement in Nazi Germany headed by Jakob Wilhelm Hauer. As a side note, he wrote his doctoral thesis (1926) on Friedrich Nietzsche and Stefan George. For his views on Christianity see Wilhelm Kusserow, *Nordischer Glaube und Christentum. Die Wesensfrage unserer Zeit* (Schkeuditz: Sieben Stufen Verlag, 1940). On the German Faith Movement see Ulrich Nanko, *Die deutsche Glaubensbewegung. Eine historische und soziologische Untersuchung* (Marburg: Diagonal-Verlag, 1993).

Schuler and his companions. As a teenager and throughout my early twenties, I was one of them.

In Schuler's view, the European peoples will either rid themselves of the imported religion altogether or cease to exist.<sup>13</sup> But what is it that makes Christianity so dangerous in Schuler's opinion? Why does Jesus become the bogeyman? And what does Schuler offer instead? Most importantly, however, why did Kreatismus fail to attract followers, even among anti-Christian neo-Nazis? I attempt to answer these questions by delving into Dietrich Schuler's literature that permeated the movement during the first decade of the 21<sup>st</sup> century. While adopting a bird's-eye view in parts of this thesis, I will draw on my personal experience in other parts as well. It is therefore necessary to problematize my own involvement in the movement. I will do this in the first chapter. To give the reader an overview, I shall subsequently shed light on anti-Christian movements that already existed in Imperial and Weimar Germany as well as the Third Reich. After a brief summary of anti-Christian organizations in the latter half of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, I will thoroughly examine Dietrich Schuler's writings. The third section of this thesis will be an assessment of Schuler's impact on the broader German neo-Nazi movement. Moreover, in this section, I shall ponder the question why Schuler was unsuccessful in turning his secular disciples into actual believers. I will use and build on a framework put forth by the American sociologist Rodney Stark.

When Stark published a paper on why religious movements succeed or fail in 1996, he greatly expanded the scope of his 1987 theory in order to include all movements, not just cults.<sup>14</sup> Curiously, however, only three out of the ten propositions in his model to determine the success or failure of a religious movement pertain to doctrine. While I do not question the validity of Stark's sociological approach, I will expand his theoretical framework by adding a few propositions of my own that pertain to the doctrinal nature of a given religion in regard to its "fitness" in evolutionary terms. Studying the failure of Kreatismus, I have become convinced that theology plays a major role in the success or failure of religious movements. In

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<sup>13</sup> See e.g. Dietrich Schuler, *Kreatismus als geistige Revolution. Die notwendige Überwindung der Wüstenreligion*, 2<sup>nd</sup> edition (Bad Wildungen: Thule-Bibliothek, 2009), 194, 202.

<sup>14</sup> See Rodney Stark, "Why Religious Movements Succeed or Fail: A Revised General Model," *Journal of Contemporary Religion* 11, no. 2 (1996): 133. For his 1987 article see Rodney Stark, "How New Religions Succeed: A Theoretical Model," in *The Future of New Religious Movements*, ed. D. Bromley and P. E. Hammond (Macon: Mercer University Press, 1987).

order to answer the question why Kreatismus did not become a practiced religion as envisioned by Schuler, I will also draw on Martin Riesebrodt's book *The Promise of Salvation* and the theory of religion he proposes.<sup>15</sup>

The anti-Christianism this thesis is concerned with is no less anti-Semitic than were the aforementioned theologians who tried to purge Christianity of its Jewish elements. One core belief of its proponents is that the Jews purposely (or subconsciously aware of the negative implications) passed on Christianity to the Romans and thereby accomplished the downfall of the Roman Empire.<sup>16</sup> This, of course, is a conspiracy theory: A set of explanations of events that are claimed to have been caused by a conspiracy.<sup>17</sup> Marijn Bethlehem, a former master student at Leiden University, states that all conspiracy theories "are similar in their search for orchestrated events of evil actors in what most other people regard as coincidence."<sup>18</sup> While I will point out the conspiratorial nature of some of Schuler's claims *en passant*, they are by no means a focus of this thesis.<sup>19</sup>

The aim of this thesis is to explain what Kreatismus was and why it failed. Furthermore, it should be possible to explain the success and failure of other religious movements using the expanded framework I shall propose. The thesis is thus pioneering work in the field of religious studies. This is all the more the case as there is to date no scholarly book or article that focusses on or even mentions Dietrich Schuler's megalomaniacal attempt to replace Christianity with a new religion. The scholarly neglect of Kreatismus, three decades after its "invention" and 20 years after it started to have an impact on the broader German neo-Nazi

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<sup>15</sup> Martin Riesebrodt, *The Promise of Salvation: A Theory of Religion*, translated by Steven Rendall. Chicago, IL: University of Chicago Press, 2010.

<sup>16</sup> See, e.g. Schuler, *Kreatismus als geistige Revolution*, 214, 285.

<sup>17</sup> See Massimiliano Demata, Virginia Zorzi and Angela Zottola, "Conspiracy Theory Discourses. Critical Inquiries into the Language of Anti-Science, Post-Trutherism, Mis/Disinformation and Alternative Media," in *Conspiracy Theory Discourses*, ed. Massimiliano Demata, Virginia Zorzi and Angela Zottola (Amsterdam and Philadelphia: John Benjamins Publishing Company, 2022), 1.

<sup>18</sup> Marijn Bethlehem, "The Failure of QAnon's Storm. A Study of Conspiracy Theories and Failed Prophecy," MA thesis (Leiden University, 2021), 4. In regard to the emergence of feminism, Dietrich Schuler claims apodictically: "Rein gar nichts geschieht zufällig, schon gar nicht bei Hauptentwicklungen der Politik." Schuler, *Der Kreatismus als geistige Revolution*, 306.

<sup>19</sup> The literature on conspiracy theories is extensive and expanding. There is even an ongoing debate on whether or not conspiracy theories should be studied as religions. See David G. Robertson, Egil Asprem and Asbjørn Dyrendal, "Introducing the Field: Conspiracy Theory in, about, and as Religion," in *Handbook of Conspiracy Theory and Contemporary Religion*, ed. David G. Robertson, Egil Asprem and Asbjørn Dyrendal (Leiden: Brill, 2018), 4.

movement, is especially odd given the fact that there is an abundance of literature on the Ludendorff movement and neo-pagan far-right groups in contemporary Germany.<sup>20</sup>

## 2 My Ideological Background

I bought one of Schuler's books in 2005 at the age of 16 or 17. As he lived in the neighboring village, we sometimes had lengthy conversations in his home office. Despite my young age, I was part of the inner circle of the movement. The articles and books I wrote between 2005 and 2015 reflect this.<sup>21</sup> Some of them I will use as primary sources in this thesis. At the time I purchased Schuler's book, I was already both highly critical of Christianity and a neo-Nazi. My negative view of Christianity was shaped through my constant exposure to zealous belief in absurd dogmas, since my parents, although Protestant ministers, were deeply involved in a Charismatic movement. I was hence raised in an extremely religious environment. In fact, I was the only atheist in the family, perhaps with the exceptions of one uncle and my paternal grandfather, whom I admired for having served as an officer on the Eastern Front during World War II, but who spoke very little. All of the stories regarding this episode of his life, I learnt through my grandmother. While it was thus teenage rebellion mixed with the ability to question dogma and think critically that turned me into an adversary of Christianity, it was ironically filial piety which led me to zealously defending the doctrines of National Socialism, for I knew that my great-grandfather, a World War I veteran, had been a convinced Nazi. He had even been the mayor of a village from 1933 till 1945. Unsurprisingly, his daughters, my paternal grandmother and her sister, had also been enthusiastically supportive of the regime

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<sup>20</sup> See, e.g. Frank Schnoor, *Mathilde Ludendorff und das Christentum. Eine radikale völkische Position in der Zeit der Weimarer Republik und des NS-Staates* (Egelsbach et al.: Verlag Hänzel-Hohenhausen, 2001); Bettina Amm, *Die Ludendorff-Bewegung. Zwischen nationalistischem Kampfbund und völkischer Weltanschauungssekte* (Hamburg: Verlag ad fontes, 2006); Gideon Thalmann and Felix Reiter, *Im Kampf gegen "überstaatliche Mächte." Die völkische Ludendorff-Bewegung – von "Jugenderziehung" bis "Ahnenpflege"* (Braunschweig: Bildungsvereinigung Arbeit und Leben, 2011); Julian Feldmann and Christoph Gümmer, *Rechtsextrem im Geheimen. Die völkischen Ludendorffer und ihr Umfeld* (Braunschweig: Bildungsvereinigung Arbeit und Leben, 2020); Franziska Hundseder, *Wotans Jünger. Neuheidnische Gruppen zwischen Esoterik und Rechtsradikalismus* (München: Heyne, 1998); Friedrich-Wilhelm Haack, *Wotans Wiederkehr. Blut-, Boden- und Rasse-Religion* (München: Claudius-Verlag, 1981); Gideon Botsch, "Nordische Zeitung (seit 1933)," in *Handbuch des Antisemitismus. Judenfeindschaft in Geschichte und Gegenwart*, vol. 6, ed. Wolfgang Benz (Berlin: De Gruyter Saur, 2013), 499–501.

<sup>21</sup> One book that I wrote in 2011 was indexed and, effectively, banned from circulation in Germany by the Federal Department for Media Harmful to Young Persons (*Bundesprüfstelle für jugendgefährdende Medien*) on April 8, 2015: Johannes Scharf (one of my pen names), *Sein oder Nichtsein – Gedanken über Rasse und Religion* (Bottrop: Forsite Verlag, 2011).



as teenagers and young adults. The same could be said about their brothers who had both fallen in the war. My grandfather's brother, who was likewise an officer on the Eastern Front, bade his father farewell by asserting that he would return "nach einem siegreichen Ende." I heard this story countless times from his sister who had Alzheimer's disease. She always concluded by sadly shaking her head and mumbling: "He didn't come back."

Knowing all this, I felt it a sheer impossibility *not* to defend this generation against the accusations of journalists and teachers. In the beginning of 2003, aged 14, I bought the right-wing newspaper *National-Zeitung* for the first time. On the front page, there was a picture of Michel Friedman, then vice president of the Central Council of Jews in Germany (*Zentralrat der Juden in Deutschland*), who had been caught up in a scandal involving cocaine and human trafficking. Needless to say, this was good fodder for any anti-Semite in the country. Besides this weekly newspaper to which I contributed several letters to the editor, I began devouring revisionist literature by authors such as Paul Rassinier, Walter Sanning, Helmut Schröcke and David Irving in order to substantiate the claims I had decided to make on the basis of deeply-felt emotions.

Together with other teenagers, I also founded a neo-Nazi group named Heathen Storm Pforzheim (*Heidnischer Sturm Pforzheim*) in 2005. Considered by the others to be an "intellectual," because I read books, I assumed leadership of the group within a few weeks and, with a short interruption, led it until 2009 when I moved to a different city.<sup>22</sup> While it still exists today, the group's membership has dwindled from some twenty male members, a female subsection and many supporters in the 2000s to just a handful of people in their late- and mid-thirties.

I will now briefly sum up my intellectual and political trajectory since then. I gradually distanced myself from anti-Semitism and conspiracy theories in general from 2015 onward. This was mainly due to my encounter with Theodor Herzl's books *Der Judenstaat* and

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<sup>22</sup> For more information about this episode of my life, see Jonathan Stumpf, *Kapriolen auf Messers Schneide. Lehrjahre eines Herumtreibers* (Pforzheim: Selbstverlag, 2022) or my interview with a German newspaper: Jonathan Stumpf, "Vom Fackelträger zum Kriegsreporter: Früherer Pforzheimer Neonazi bereist jetzt die Ukraine," *Pforzheimer Zeitung*, July 3, 2022, [https://www.pz-news.de/pforzheim\\_artikel,-Vom-Fackeltraeger-zum-Kriegsreporter-Fruherer-Pforzheimer-Neonazi-bereist-jetzt-die-Ukraine-\\_arid,1723656.html](https://www.pz-news.de/pforzheim_artikel,-Vom-Fackeltraeger-zum-Kriegsreporter-Fruherer-Pforzheimer-Neonazi-bereist-jetzt-die-Ukraine-_arid,1723656.html) (accessed February 22, 2023).

*Altneuland* which I found to be strikingly similar to my own books and ideas at the time regarding the creation of a “White ethnostate.”<sup>23</sup> The same can be said of Michael Hart’s book *Restoring America*, in which the conservative Jewish author makes the quest for a separation of the United States at county level into a rump “blue” nation pursuing current policies and a new “red” American Federal Republic. I also came to appreciate the works of the psychologists Richard Herrnstein, Steven Pinker and Jonathan Haidt. Since all these intellectuals had a Jewish background, I started to rigorously condemn anti-Semitism wherever I encountered it in the far-right movement, which led to quite a few fierce debates on platforms such as *YouTube* before most of the accounts were deleted.

Besides the aforementioned authors, I also read Albert Camus and Thomas Bauer (*Die Vereindeutigung der Welt*) as well as George Orwell’s and Umberto Eco’s essays on Nationalism and Fascism respectively, along with the books of some sober-minded classical liberals such as Ortega y Gasset’s *Der Aufstand der Massen*. When at Leiden University as an exchange student in 2019, I studied the writings of the American founding fathers, especially the *Federalist Papers* written by James Madison. I also delved into John Stuart Mill (*On Liberty*), Henry David Thoreau (*On the Duty of Civil Disobedience*), Hannah Arendt (*Elemente und Ursprünge totaler Herrschaft*), Eric Hoffer (*The True Believer*), Karl Popper (*Die offene Gesellschaft und ihre Feinde*), Hans Albert (*Traktat über kritische Vernunft*) and H. L. H. Hart (*Law, Liberty, and Morality*), and thus, politically, became a classical liberal or libertarian, deeply suspicious of collectivism, Plato, German idealism and Rousseau’s *volonté générale*.<sup>24</sup> Having embraced fallibilism, philosophically, my only firmly-held belief today is that it is extremely dangerous to have firmly-held beliefs, even if they are aligned with those held by society at large. Thus, I am still highly critical of Christianity, mainly because I abhor dogmatism and the notion of Hell. Therefore, upon reading Jonathan Edwards’ 1741 sermon “Sinners in the Hands of an Angry God” in the fall of 2019, I wrote a manuscript titled *Eine Kriegserklärung*

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<sup>23</sup> See, e.g. Johannes Scharf, *Das Kreuz des Südens. Exodus aus Europa. Ein Zukunftsroman* (Gröditz: Verlag libergraphix, 2013); Johannes Scharf, *Der weiße Ethnostaat. Geographische Konsolidierung als Strategie gegen das Verschwinden* (London: Ostara Publications, 2017); Johannes Scharf, “Wertvolle Lektionen: Altneuland und Nova Europa,” in *Kampf ums Dasein. Metapolitische Essays am Puls der Zeit*, ed. Johannes Scharf (Berlin: Europa Terra Nostra, 2019), 61-69; Johannes Scharf, “Der Gordische Knoten – Ein weißer Ethnostaat tut not!” in *Der entfesselte Prometheus. Vertreter der deutschen Alt-Right ergreifen das Wort*, ed. Georg Immanuel Nagel, Johannes Scharf and Constantin von Hoffmeister (London: Arktos, 2019), 61-76.

<sup>24</sup> See Johannes Scharf, *Der Tribaloliberalismus. Ein Plädoyer für Freiheit und Vielfalt* (Bernau: MetaPol Verlag & Medien, 2021).

*an Gott*. Since I received only negative replies from mainstream publishing houses, I submitted it to Pierre Krebs' *Thule-Seminar* that had published Dietrich Schuler's final book. There, it was enthusiastically welcomed at first, but the project was later called off because it was clear from the content of the manuscript that my worldview had changed drastically over the course of the previous four years. The manuscript was more in line with Richard Dawkins' *The God Delusion* or Tilmann Moser's *Gottesvergiftung* than with Schuler's books. Most importantly, there was nothing political about it, and I criticized Greek mythology for its Tartarus in quite the same way as I attacked the Christian concept of Hell.<sup>25</sup>

When it comes to writing this thesis, the most obvious advantage of my background is the deep and intimate knowledge I was able to acquire of Kreatismus, its architect and the people who engaged with his thoughts. A possible disadvantage is that I could be suspected of being selective and withholding critical information whenever it suits me. I am, however, taking pains to avoid such pitfalls. Regarding my own contributions to anti-Semitic anti-Christianism from 2005 till 2015, it is my goal to be as transparent as possible. This thesis is certainly not an attempt to whitewash my political past.

### 3 Anti-Christianism Before and During the Third Reich

Although this study focusses on Schuler's Kreatismus and the anti-Christian German right at the beginning of the 21<sup>st</sup> century, it is also necessary to trace the historical roots of anti-Semitic anti-Christianism. This endeavor is part of sketching the landscape and assessing the field. Any such overview must, of course, start with the *völkisch* movement, an ethno-nationalist and anti-Semitic movement that emerged in the late 19<sup>th</sup> century. Samuel Koehne notes that the "movement contained a colorful, varied, and often bewildering range of religious beliefs."<sup>26</sup> One of its proponents was Oskar Michel, who founded the German Religious Federation (*Deutschreligiöser Bund*) in 1903.<sup>27</sup> In 1909, Otto Reuter, another proponent of the *völkisch*

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<sup>25</sup> See Johannes Scharf, *Eine Kriegserklärung an Gott* (London: Ostara Publications, 2020), 45f.

<sup>26</sup> Samuel Koehne, "Were the National Socialists a *Völkisch* Party? Paganism, Christianity, and the Nazi Christmas," *Central European History* 47 (2014): 760.

<sup>27</sup> See Ulrich Nanko, "Das Spektrum völkisch-religiöser Organisationen von der Jahrhundertwende bis ins 'Dritte Reich'," in *Völkische Religion und die Krisen der Moderne. Entwürfe "arteigener" Glaubenssysteme seit der Jahrhundertwende*, ed. Stefanie von Schnurbein and Justus H. Ulbricht (Würzburg: Verlag Königshausen & Neumann, 2001), 208.

movement, published the pamphlet *Sigfrid oder Christus?!*, in which he polemicizes against Christianity and demands a revival of Germanic religiosity.<sup>28</sup> The pamphlet was well-received in the movement and, although he had initially published it anonymously, Reuter became renowned for it in later years.<sup>29</sup> He was active in the German Order (*Deutscher Orden*) as well as the German Religious Community (*Deutschreligiöse Gemeinschaft*), both of which he founded in 1911.<sup>30</sup> One year later, the painter and poet Ludwig Fahrenkrog founded a similar organization. It was named Germanic Faith Community (*Germanische Glaubens-Gemeinschaft*) in 1913 but had only a few members until the 1920s, the heyday of the *völkisch* movement.<sup>31</sup> Other well-known agitators of the *völkisch* movement were Theodor Fritsch, author of the book *Der falsche Gott*,<sup>32</sup> Wilhelm Kusserow, who established the Nordic Faith Community (*Nordische Glaubensgemeinschaft*), and Jakob Wilhelm Hauer, who founded the German Faith Movement (*Deutsche Glaubensbewegung*), as well as general Erich Ludendorff and his second wife Mathilde, whose philosophy can be described as “esoteric racist, anti-Semitic, and vaguely neopagan.”<sup>33</sup>

Mathilde Ludendorff, who was not only a religious philosopher but also a feminist and a trained physician, “claimed to base her spiritual and philosophical system upon Germanic pagan beliefs, the philosophies of Kant and Schopenhauer, and Nietzsche’s *Genealogy of Morals*.”<sup>34</sup> According to her, in order to regain confidence as well as “spiritual strength” and greatness, Germany “had to expel the alien influences of Christianity, Judaism, and the French Enlightenment.”<sup>35</sup> She was convinced that God reveals Himself to different peoples in different ways and that the mixing of the races would lead to a loss of this revelatory potential. She further “argued that when missionaries entered the Germanic world of Northern Europe, they extinguished the ancient Germans’ maturing spiritual awareness and replaced it with

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<sup>28</sup> See Uwe Puschner, “Reuter, Otto Sigfrid,” *Neue Deutsche Biographie* 21 (2003): 465-467, <https://www.deutsche-biographie.de/sfz105410.html> (accessed March 4, 2023).

<sup>29</sup> See Samuel Koehne, “Nazism and Religion: The Problem of ‘Positive Christianity’,” *Australian Journal of Politics and History* 60, no. 1 (2014): 36, footnote 41.

<sup>30</sup> See Puschner, “Reuter,” 465f.

<sup>31</sup> See Stefanie von Schnurbein, “Die Suche nach einer ‘arteigenen’ Religion in ‘germanisch-’ und ‘deutschgläubigen’ Gruppen,” in *Handbuch zur ‘Völkischen Bewegung’ 1871–1918*, ed. Uwe Puschner, Walter Schmitz and Justus H. Ulbricht (München et al.: Saur, 1996), 180.

<sup>32</sup> See Koehne, “Nazism and Religion,” 35.

<sup>33</sup> Steven Naftzinger, “‘Heil Ludendorff’. Erich Ludendorff and Nazism, 1925-1937,” PhD diss. (City University of New York, 2002), 18.

<sup>34</sup> Naftzinger, “Erich Ludendorff and Nazism,” 24.

<sup>35</sup> Naftzinger, “Erich Ludendorff and Nazism,” 25.

superstition and fear of death.”<sup>36</sup> One of the couple’s accusations hurled at “the Jews” was that the gospel authors “had stolen Indian legends, altered them with Jewish ideas, replacing Aryan princes and saviors, Krishna and Buddha, with Jesus.”<sup>37</sup> The Ludendorffs believed that Jews were in control of all supposed conspiracies, including those attributed to the Catholics and the Freemasons.<sup>38</sup> “There is only one Christianity,” states Erich Ludendorff, “just as there is only one Freemasonry – and both are Jewish.”<sup>39</sup> From the late 1920s onward, Erich Ludendorff began to view Hitler and the Nazis as agents of the supposed conspiratorial powers pulling the strings in the background. He publicly accused Hitler of having sold out the German people to the Pope.<sup>40</sup> While the Ludendorffs’ *Tannenberg-Bund* was banned by the Nazis in September 1933, along with their religious organization called *Deutschvolk*, Erich Ludendorff was permitted to reestablish such a religious group shortly before his death in 1937. Schuler’s attempt to create a new religion has much in common with Mathilde Ludendorff’s aspirations, while most other aforementioned groups did not develop theological systems of interrelated beliefs to a similar extent.

Let us now turn to the religious beliefs of the Nazis themselves. In the mid-2000s, the relationship of National Socialism and religion, in particular Christianity, “moved to the forefront of historical inquiry.”<sup>41</sup> While Nazism had long been thought of as an inherently anti-Christian ideology, Steigmann-Gall argues that the paganists in the NSDAP “were less important in the end than the proponents of a ‘positive’, that is, a nazified Christianity.”<sup>42</sup> And even the paganists, he asserts, displayed a “surprisingly favorable view of Protestantism, one that went beyond mere calculation to reveal an affinity, perhaps even a dependence upon, certain varieties of Protestant thought.”<sup>43</sup> Thus, he concludes one of his articles by stating:

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<sup>36</sup> Naftzinger, “Erich Ludendorff and Nazism,” 31.

<sup>37</sup> Henschel, *Aryan Jesus*, 46, footnote 86.

<sup>38</sup> See Naftzinger, “Erich Ludendorff and Nazism,” 33.

<sup>39</sup> Cited in Naftzinger, “Erich Ludendorff and Nazism,” 33.

<sup>40</sup> See Bettina Amm, “Die Ludendorff-Bewegung im Nationalsozialismus – Annäherung und Abgrenzungsversuche,” in *Die völkisch-religiöse Bewegung im Nationalsozialismus. Eine Beziehungs- und Konfliktgeschichte*, ed. Uwe Puschner and Clemens (Göttingen: Vollnhals Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 2012), 129.

<sup>41</sup> Richard J. Evans, “Nazism, Christianity and Political Religion: A Debate,” *Journal of Contemporary History* 42, no. 1 (2007): 5. Cf. also Milan Babík, “Nazism as a Secular Religion,” *History and Theory* 45 (2006): 375.

<sup>42</sup> Evans, “Nazism, Christianity and Political Religion,” 6. See also Richard Steigmann-Gall, *The Holy Reich: Nazi Conceptions of Christianity, 1919-1945* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2003).

<sup>43</sup> Richard Steigmann-Gall, “Rethinking Nazism and Religion: How Anti-Christian Were the ‘Pagans’?,” *Central European History* 36, no. 1 (2003): 103. This “kinship” between Germanic paganism and Protestantism was sensed by the French monarchist Charles Maurras. He views both as precursors to the French Revolution and the

“The only paganist to reject Christ in any shape, and the only paganist to be expelled from the Nazi Party, was Ludendorff.”<sup>44</sup> Although anti-Christian views were held by high-ranking party officials such as Heinrich Himmler and Martin Bormann, even the supposedly pagan chief-ideologue of the Nazi Party, Alfred Rosenberg,<sup>45</sup> “championed the [...] blending of ‘Germanic’ Faith with Christianity.”<sup>46</sup> His ultimate fantasy was to join Norse mythology and parts of the New Testament together, so that the Nordic sagas and fairytales would “take the place of the Old Testament stories of pimps and cattle dealers.”<sup>47</sup> In his opinion, “Christianity could be reformed if it rid itself of its ‘Judeo-Roman infections’.”<sup>48</sup> In an internal SS memorandum, Heinrich Himmler, who may be considered the most pagan of all men and women in charge, decreed: “In ideological training I forbid every attack against Christ as a person, since such attacks or insults that Christ was a Jew are unworthy of us and certainly untrue historically.”<sup>49</sup> This seems to indicate that Himmler believed the Aryan-Jesus hypothesis Chamberlain and others had popularized in the latter half of “the long nineteenth century.”

As for Adolf Hitler himself, there is a growing scholarly interest in his religious beliefs.<sup>50</sup> While he never left the Catholic Church and Samuel Koehne thinks he is best characterized as a “deist,”<sup>51</sup> Mikael Nilsson states that Hitler certainly admired Jesus,<sup>52</sup> whom he considered to be an anti-Jewish role model.<sup>53</sup> In February 1937, Joseph Goebbels recorded a conversation

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modern world. See Richard Faber, “‘Rom gegen Judäa, Judäa gegen Rom’. Eine Kritik des schwarzen Nietzscheanismus,” in *Anti-Semitism, Paganism, Voelkish Religion*, 107-110.

<sup>44</sup> Steigmann-Gall, “Rethinking Nazism and Religion,” 105.

<sup>45</sup> He became Hitler’s Delegate for the Entire Intellectual and Philosophical Education and Instruction of the National Socialist Party in January 1934. See Ulrike Ehret, “Catholicism and Judaism in the Catholic Defence Against Alfred Rosenberg, 1934-1938: Anti-Jewish Images in an Age of Race Science,” *European History Quarterly* 40, no. 1 (2010): 35.

<sup>46</sup> Koehne, “Were the National Socialists a *Völkisch* Party?,” 789.

<sup>47</sup> Cited in Samuel Koehne, “The Racial Yardstick: ‘Ethnotheism’ and Official Nazi Views on Religion,” *German Studies Review* 37, no. 3 (2014): 586.

<sup>48</sup> Ehret, “Catholicism and Judaism,” 36.

<sup>49</sup> Cited in Steigmann-Gall, “Rethinking Nazism and Religion,” 76.

<sup>50</sup> See, e.g. Michael Reißmann, *Hitlers Gott. Vorsehungsglaube und Sendungsbewusstsein des deutschen Diktators* (Zürich: Pendo, 2001); Michael Hesemann, *Die fatale Heilslehre des Nationalsozialismus* (München: Pattloch Verlag, 2004); David Redles, *Hitler’s Millennial Reich: Apocalyptic Belief and the Search for Salvation* (New York: New York University Press, 2005); Rainer Bucher, *Hitlers Theologie* (Würzburg: Echter Verlag, 2008); Derek Hastings, *Catholicism & the Roots of Nazism: Religious Identity & National Socialism* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2010); Friedrich Tomberg, *Das Christentum in Hitlers Weltanschauung* (München: Wilhelm Fink Verlag, 2012); Richard Weikart, *Hitler’s Religion: The Twisted Beliefs that Drove the Third Reich* (Washington, D.C.: Regnery History, 2016).

<sup>51</sup> Koehne, “Nazism and Religion,” 30.

<sup>52</sup> See Mikael Nilsson, “Christ on the Crooked Cross: The Divinity of Jesus in Hitler’s *Weltanschauung*,” *Journal of Religious History* 45, no. 2 (2021): 235.

<sup>53</sup> See Nilsson, “Christ on the Crooked Cross,” 233.

with Hitler in his diary, “in which Hitler said that Christ too had fought against Jewish world domination, and for this the Jews had nailed him to the cross.”<sup>54</sup> In his book *Das Christentum in Hitlers Weltanschauung*, Friedrich Tomberg asserts that Hitler placed himself and the entire National Socialist movement explicitly in the footsteps of Christ by assigning his party the task of finally realizing what Jesus had tried to accomplish.<sup>55</sup> Moreover, the Nazi Party’s official program stated that the party stood for a “positive Christianity,” a term that “was vague and open to interpretation.”<sup>56</sup> For Dietrich Schuler, the Nazis’ stance on Christianity amounts to nothing short of a tragedy.<sup>57</sup> He laments the fact that the churches were spared and claims that the National Socialists’ downfall can mainly be attributed to Christianity.<sup>58</sup>

#### 4 The Anti-Christian Right in the 2000s

Before we turn to the anti-Christian German right in the first decade of the 21<sup>st</sup> century, a paragraph on neo-pagan groups after 1945 seems warranted.<sup>59</sup> Wilhelm Kusserow’s *Nordische Glaubensgemeinschaft* survived the process of de-Nazification because its founder was never a member of the NSDAP.<sup>60</sup> In the 1950s, the organization was transformed into a registered association that bore and still bears the name *Artgemeinschaft*. Still in the early 1950s, Mathilde Ludendorff reorganized her religious movement by establishing the *Bund für Gotterkenntnis*. The group was banned in 1961 but the ruling was annulled due to procedural errors in 1977. Another important figure in post-1945 anti-Christianism was undoubtedly Sigrid Hunke. According to her, the “Judeo-Christian” worldview brought about “an unnatural segregation of the Holy and the profane, leading to materialism and the debasement of all spiritual values.”<sup>61</sup> Contrastingly, Schuler accuses Christianity of having brought about the

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<sup>54</sup> Nilsson, “Christ on the Crooked Cross,” 237.

<sup>55</sup> See Tomberg, *Das Christentum in Hitlers Weltanschauung*, 14.

<sup>56</sup> Koehne, “Nazism and Religion,” 32. Koehne points out that “positive Christianity” had a long-established theological meaning, although he doubts that this is the meaning the Nazis had in mind.

<sup>57</sup> See Schuler, *Kreatismus als geistige Revolution*, 188.

<sup>58</sup> See Schuler, *Kreatismus als geistige Revolution*, 319f.: “Hitler und der Nationalsozialismus sind innerlich und äußerlich in erster Linie am überlieferten Christentum gescheitert [...]. Die gesamte Antihitlerkoalition im In- wie im Ausland war gutmenschlich-christoid durch und durch, und sie ist es bis heute.”

<sup>59</sup> For an overview that includes ariosophic groups such as the *Armanen-Orden*, see Stefanie von Schnurbein, “Transformationen völkischer Religion seit 1945,” in *Völkische Religion*, 410-416.

<sup>60</sup> Ulrich Nanko, “Religiöse Gruppenbildungen vormaliger ‘Deutschgläubiger’ nach 1945,” in *Anti-Semitism, Paganism, Voelkish Religion*, 124.

<sup>61</sup> Horst Junginger, “Sigrid Hunke (1913-1999) Europe’s New Religion and its Old Stereotypes,” in *Anti-Semitism, Paganism, Voelkish Religion*, 151.

devaluation of the material world and the profane in favor of the spirit. Hunke seceded from the liberal Unitarians in 1988 with 200 followers, forming a new religious group named *Bund Deutscher Unitarier. Religionsgemeinschaft europäischen Geistes*.<sup>62</sup> While highly critical of Christianity, she admired Islam and the Arab world. She had a strong impact on Alain de Benoist, the mastermind of the *Nouvelle Droite*.<sup>63</sup> Together with other French right-wing intellectuals, such as the historian Dominique Venner, he established the *Groupement de recherche et d'études pour la civilisation européenne (GRECE)* in 1968. Roughly a decade later, Pierre Krebs founded the *Thule-Seminar*. One time, either before or after I had delivered my speech at the organization's annual conference, Pierre Krebs told me that, in his view, Christians should not be considered part of the New Right, because in spite of all the differences that had persisted between de Benoist and himself, they had both always been anti-Christian.<sup>64</sup>

Alain de Benoist's 1982 book *Heide sein*, originally published with the revisionist publishing house *Grabert-Verlag*,<sup>65</sup> was later re-published by Pierre Krebs. The *Thule-Seminar* also ran a journal called *Elemente der Metapolitik zur europäischen Neugeburt* from 1986 to 1998. It was revived in the 2000s, perhaps due to the new momentum the anti-Christian movement had gained through Schuler's publications. In a 2007 issue, Hans-Jürgen Hagel launched an article titled "Zur Unglaubwürdigkeit des Judäo-Christentums."<sup>66</sup> In the same issue, Dietrich Schuler published an article on his new religion "Kreatismus."<sup>67</sup> It was also in 2007 that Andreas Thierry's publishing company *Verlags- & Medienhaus Hohenberg* not only released a new book written by Schuler, titled *Bausteine für eine Religion der Zukunft*,<sup>68</sup> but also devoted an

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<sup>62</sup> See Junginger, "Sigrid Hunke," 160.

<sup>63</sup> See Nanko, "Religiöse Gruppenbildungen," 129, footnote 49.

<sup>64</sup> A prominent example of a Christian who is considered to be a leading figure of the New Right in Germany is Götz Kubitschek. He owns the publishing company *Antaios*.

<sup>65</sup> Alain de Benoist, *Heide sein. Zu einem neuen Anfang. Die europäische Glaubensalternative* (Tübingen: Grabert-Verlag, 1982). As a side note, the founder of the publishing house Grabert-Verlag had studied under Jakob Wilhelm Hauer, the founder of the German Faith Movement.

<sup>66</sup> Hans-Jürgen Hagel, "Zur Unglaubwürdigkeit des Judäo-Christentums," *Elemente der Metapolitik zur europäischen Neugeburt. Die Buchzeitschrift des Thule-Seminars e. V.* 7 (2007): 41-56.

<sup>67</sup> Dietrich Schuler, "Kreatismus," *Elemente der Metapolitik zur europäischen Neugeburt. Die Buchzeitschrift des Thule-Seminars e. V.* 7 (2007): 25-32.

<sup>68</sup> Dietrich Schuler, *Bausteine für eine Religion der Zukunft. Urmonergon und Wiedergeburt* (Ellwangen: Verlags- & Medienhaus Hohenberg, 2007). There had been a somewhat similar but much shorter version published by Thierry's predecessor Lars Käßler in 2004: Dietrich Schuler, *Urmonergon und Wiedergeburt. Bausteine für eine Religion der Zukunft* (Heilbronn: Volk in Bewegung Verlag & Medien, 2004). *Verlags- & Medienhaus Hohenberg* also published books such as Erich Glagau's *Müssen Kinder so heißen?*, in which the author recalls private encounters with parents who named their children after Biblical figures such as Sarah or Esther. In these



entire issue of its journal *Volk in Bewegung* to the perceived perils of Christianity and the necessity for Europeans to overcome it. Throughout the 2000s and the subsequent decade, the journal continued to be the flagship of the anti-Christian right in Germany. While rather obscure groups such as the *Artgemeinschaft* with their journal *Nordische Zeitung* and the Ludendorff movement with their monthly publication *Mensch und Maß* still existed, *Volk in Bewegung* managed to permeate the broader neo-Nazi movement.

## 5 A New Religion: Dietrich Schuler's Kreatismus

Born to a teacher and his wife in Stuttgart in 1927, Dietrich Schuler spent most of his childhood in the Black Forest.<sup>69</sup> A few months before the end of the war, he was drafted and stationed in Bohemia.<sup>70</sup> Between 1947 and 1949, he studied in Reutlingen to become a teacher like his father, who had not survived the war.<sup>71</sup> Schuler was a member of the *Sozialistische Reichspartei* until this far-right party was banned in 1952.<sup>72</sup> In July 1963, his home was searched and a political manuscript titled *Ketzeraphorismen* was confiscated.<sup>73</sup> On the grounds of this manuscript, he was briefly incarcerated in Stuttgart-Stammheim and later sentenced to seven months in jail.<sup>74</sup> Although he had initially lost the status of civil servant, he soon became a teacher again.<sup>75</sup> It was only after his retirement in 1991, that Schuler would start publishing his thoughts on Christianity, which had developed in a "period of silence."<sup>76</sup> As mentioned in the introduction, with his book *Jesus: Europas falscher Gott*, Schuler was able to reach a wider audience for the first time.<sup>77</sup> He died in 2011.<sup>78</sup> In this section, I will explore the nature of his "new religion," but I shall start by dealing with his rejection of Christianity.

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conversations, he reveals "the truth" about these Biblical characters to the parents. However, he does note a "positive" example in the beginning, a little boy named "Adolf." Erich Glagau, *Müssen Kinder so heißen? Warum biblische Namen nicht zu deutschen Kindern passen!* (Verlags- & Medienhaus Hohenberg, 2006), 9-11.

<sup>69</sup> See Andreas Thierry, *Dietrich Schuler – Mensch & Werk. Neue Religion des Lebens – Überwindung des Christentums* (Ellwangen: Verlags- & Medienhaus Hohenberg, 2007), no pagination.

<sup>70</sup> See Thierry, *Dietrich Schuler*.

<sup>71</sup> See Thierry, *Dietrich Schuler*.

<sup>72</sup> See Thierry, *Dietrich Schuler*.

<sup>73</sup> See Thierry, *Dietrich Schuler*.

<sup>74</sup> See Thierry, *Dietrich Schuler*.

<sup>75</sup> See Thierry, *Dietrich Schuler*.

<sup>76</sup> See Thierry, *Dietrich Schuler*.

<sup>77</sup> This is also Thierry's assessment. See Thierry, *Dietrich Schuler*.

<sup>78</sup> Andreas Thierry, "Gefährte Dietrich Schuler. 'Anti-Christ' und Visionär einer Religion der Zukunft," *Thule-Seminar*, [http://www.thule-seminar.org/nekrologie\\_schuler.htm](http://www.thule-seminar.org/nekrologie_schuler.htm) (accessed March 26, 2023).

## 5.1 The Jew Jesus

Richard Steigmann-Gall tells the story of a 13-year-old squad leader of the Hitler Youth who wrote to Heinrich Himmler in June 1937 after hearing a political speaker mention that Jesus had been a Jew.<sup>79</sup> Finding this particular piece of information very troubling and hard to digest, he asked Himmler for clarification in his letter. He received an answer from Rudolf Brandt, who was Himmler's personal assistant. It read: "The *Reichsführer* is of the opinion that Christ was not a Jew. You must certainly have misunderstood the speaker."<sup>80</sup> In the same month, Himmler issued the internal SS memorandum that forbade any attack on Jesus, "since such attacks or insults that Christ was a Jew are unworthy of us and certainly untrue historically."<sup>81</sup> Dietrich Schuler, on the other hand, appears to be very certain about Jesus' Jewishness and it is probably not far-fetched to assume that this is the main reason for his rejection of the Christian faith. To Houston Stewart Chamberlain's verdict that Jesus "had not a drop of genuinely Jewish blood in his veins,"<sup>82</sup> Schuler responds: "Ein gröberer Unsinn ist kaum denkbar."<sup>83</sup>

In his final book, *Kreatismus als geistige Revolution*, published two years before his death, Schuler states: "There can be absolutely no doubt that the Bible is entirely Jewish at heart, that it was written by Jewish authors, and that the twelve apostles were also Jews."<sup>84</sup> He then goes on to claim: "Only the Jesus handed down in the New Testament, whether he actually lived or not, became historically effective. And he, with his 'Marxist-proletarian' characteristics, was a Jew through and through. Any other assertion is folly dictated by wishful thinking."<sup>85</sup>

In Schuler's opinion, Jesus was "in mancherlei Hinsicht der typischste Jude überhaupt."<sup>86</sup> He further states that there was never a "biological connection" between the Europeans and their imported religion: "Ein solcher verbindet aber die mosaische Religion seit eh und je mit dem

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<sup>79</sup> See Steigmann-Gall, "Rethinking Nazism and Religion," 75.

<sup>80</sup> Cited in Steigmann-Gall, "Rethinking Nazism and Religion," 75.

<sup>81</sup> Cited in Steigmann-Gall, "Rethinking Nazism and Religion," 76.

<sup>82</sup> Cited in Henschel, *Aryan Jesus*, 42.

<sup>83</sup> Schuler, *Bausteine für eine Religion der Zukunft*, 43.

<sup>84</sup> Schuler, *Kreatismus als geistige Revolution*, 276.

<sup>85</sup> Schuler, *Kreatismus als geistige Revolution*, 276f.

<sup>86</sup> Schuler, *Kreatismus als geistige Revolution*, 128.

Judentum.”<sup>87</sup> Thus, the German Christians rowed helplessly somewhere between Berlin and Jerusalem in Schuler’s view.<sup>88</sup> He states: “A genuine *Volksgemeinschaft* is unthinkable without a uniform religion that is valid for everyone. Such a religion must not be adopted from foreign cultures, but must grow out of one’s own blood.”<sup>89</sup> Although Schuler rejects any notion of other-worldly creators, he writes: “We could still sympathize with some ideas regarding a creator [...], but the connection of this creator with the figure of a crucified Jewish rebel prophet [...] displays an awful tastelessness and is absolutely unworthy of a great civilization.”<sup>90</sup> Note that there were brilliant thinkers from the Roman emperor Julian the Apostate to the realist writer Theodor Storm who found the notion of a god nailed to a cross unacceptable and even appalling, but it is especially the fact that it was a “Jewish rebel prophet” that seems to bother Schuler.<sup>91</sup>

What Schuler dislikes most about Christianity, besides its Jewish origins, is that its ethics inevitably lead to a situation sooner or later, in which the “mighty” find themselves turned into the slaves of the “weaklings.”<sup>92</sup> He subsumes the tenets of Christianity as follows: “Everything that is small, despised, and worthless ‘in the eyes of the world,’ has been chosen by ‘God.’”<sup>93</sup> Therefore, according to Schuler, the current day and age are “marked by a pushy cult of the Negro, colored and handicapped, an obvious byproduct of the Christian idealization of all that is miserable (*Miserabilismus*).”<sup>94</sup> Christianity is thus also inherently anti-German and anti-Germanic in Schuler’s view because “the German” allegedly embodied everything that the Christian “minus spirit” despises: “Order, authority and superior creativity.”<sup>95</sup> Moreover, the greater a people or an individual are, the easier it is to condemn them through the lens of Christianity.<sup>96</sup> The export of Christianity to Europe was therefore a “salesman-like

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<sup>87</sup> Schuler, *Zeitenwende total*, 93.

<sup>88</sup> See Schuler, *Bausteine für eine Religion der Zukunft*, 67.

<sup>89</sup> Schuler, *Bausteine für eine Religion der Zukunft*, 67.

<sup>90</sup> Schuler, *Bausteine für eine Religion der Zukunft*, 71.

<sup>91</sup> There are many other instances in which Dietrich Schuler deplores this fact in his writings.

<sup>92</sup> “Nun ist Christentum aber eine Werteverkehrung und der Trick, aus den Starken die Sklaven der Schwachen zu machen.” Dietrich Schuler, *Zeitenwende total. Die Weltschau des Kreatismus* (Birkenfeld: Selbstverlag, 2000), 85.

<sup>93</sup> Schuler, *Kreatismus als geistige Revolution*, 129.

<sup>94</sup> Schuler, *Kreatismus als geistige Revolution*, 131. Similarly, in *Jesus: Europas falscher Gott*, Schuler claims: “Je unfähiger irgendein Stamm auf dem weiten Erdenrund ist [...], desto höher steigt er in der moralischen Wertung des Christentums und der von ihm abhängigen ‘weltlichen’ Ideologien. Hier liegt auch der Grund für den nicht mehr zu steigernden Farbigenkult der Gegenwart.” Schuler, *Jesus*, 126f.

<sup>95</sup> Schuler, *Kreatismus als geistige Revolution*, 131.

<sup>96</sup> See Schuler, *Zeitenwende total*, 87.

masterstroke" in Schuler's eyes: "The Oriental was selling a sacred magic potion to the Europeans, and little did the gullible know that it was the most deadly long-acting poison ever concocted."<sup>97</sup> He goes on to mock "'Christian' anti-Semitism," that accused "the Jews" of not having tasted of the supposed poison themselves: "Die Rabbis müssen sich schepps und scheckig gelacht haben."<sup>98</sup> He also speaks of Christianity having been "smuggled in" (*eingeschleust*), which implies conscious actors behind the scenes. I have stressed the fact that this is a typical conspiracy theory in the introduction.

However, this is not the *only* conspiracy theory. Another narrative of a conspiratorial nature to be found in Schuler's writings concerns the supposed Jewish world domination: The Europeans have turned the insignificant Hebrew god Yahweh into "God" proper and, during their expansion over the globe, established him in every corner of the world.<sup>99</sup> Had it not been for Christianity, asserts Schuler, "the Jews" would be but an insignificant tribe with a strange monotheistic religion.<sup>100</sup> In Schuler's opinion, the alleged Jewish world domination is a direct consequence of the link between Judaism and Christianity. He claims that there is a "magic fascination" with "God's chosen people" that has taken hold of the subconscious.<sup>101</sup> To Schuler, it appears only logical that a culture that does not develop its **"own religion and instead accepts one that is foreign, at the center of which are [...] the 'People of God,' the 'People of the Bible' and the 'Holy Land,' [...] finally has to submit to this people politically and spiritually."**<sup>102</sup> The fact that this is one of only very few bold sentences in the entire book, highlights its importance to the author. While there is indeed a fascination with "God's chosen people" among Protestants of a certain type, chiefly in the United States, Schuler clearly overestimates the power of the Scripture in modern, secular societies. Most people, I assume, do not think of Jews as God's chosen people, they simply think of them as Jews.

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<sup>97</sup> Schuler, *Bausteine für eine Religion der Zukunft*, 43.

<sup>98</sup> Schuler, *Bausteine für eine Religion der Zukunft*, 44.

<sup>99</sup> Schuler, *Kreatismus als geistige Revolution*, 235.

<sup>100</sup> See Schuler, *Kreatismus als geistige Revolution*, 235.

<sup>101</sup> Schuler, *Kreatismus als geistige Revolution*, 269.

<sup>102</sup> Schuler, *Kreatismus als geistige Revolution*, 213. The fact that this is one of only very few bold sentences in the entire book, highlights its importance to the author.

Other grounds on which Schuler opposes Christianity include its neglect of nature,<sup>103</sup> its hostility towards science,<sup>104</sup> its devaluation of sexuality (*eros*) and the body in favor of the spirit, its negation of the actual world in favor of an imaginary afterworld,<sup>105</sup> as well as the absolutizing of “female” virtues like forgiveness.<sup>106</sup> Moreover, Schuler rhetorically raises the question why an almighty and good god would permit the manifestation of evil in the world.<sup>107</sup> Since the philosopher Gottfried Wilhelm Leibniz, this question has been known as “theodicy.” Often Schuler’s reasoning is similar to that of prominent critics of Christianity such as Bertrand Russell or Richard Dawkins and has nothing to do with his National Socialist background. Like Bertrand Russell in *Why I Am Not a Christian*, Schuler quotes passages of the New Testament that call Jesus’ moral character into question by the standards of his own teachings.<sup>108</sup> Passages such as Luke 19,27 (“But those mine enemies, which would not that I should reign over them, bring hither, and slay them before me.” *KJV*). Just as the philosopher Ludwig Feuerbach, Schuler maintains that all gods were created by humans, not the other way around.<sup>109</sup>

Since Dietrich Schuler believed that a particular religion can only be defeated by and replaced with another faith and never with skepticism alone,<sup>110</sup> and he also acknowledged that taking something away from people without offering them something new in its place was cruel,<sup>111</sup> he set out to design such a new religion himself. I shall describe this proposed religion in detail in the following chapter.

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<sup>103</sup> See Schuler, *Jesus*, 44.

<sup>104</sup> See Schuler, *Jesus*, 59.

<sup>105</sup> See Schuler, *Jesus*, 88.

<sup>106</sup> See Schuler, *Jesus*, 67-74.

<sup>107</sup> Schuler writes: “Er ist allgegenwärtig, sieht alles, hört alles, weiß alles und – läßt alles zu wegen des angeblichen Sündenfalls eines Menschenpaares. Ein solcher Gott muß doch bei der theoretischen Unterstellung seiner Existenz als das ruchloseste aller Wesen erscheinen.” Schuler, *Jesus*, 53f.

<sup>108</sup> See Schuler, *Jesus*, 104-106. Cf. Bertrand Russell, *Why I Am Not a Christian and Other Essays on Religion and Related Subjects* (London: George Allen & Unwin Ltd, 1957; London and New York: Routledge, 2004), 13-15.

<sup>109</sup> See Schuler, *Jesus*, 93.

<sup>110</sup> See Schuler, *Kreatismus als geistige Revolution*, 185. He also claims: “Religion kann immer nur durch Religion besiegt werden. Wissenschaftlichkeit allein besiegt keine Religion.” Schuler, *Zeitenwende*, 49.

<sup>111</sup> See Schuler, *Kreatismus als geistige Revolution*, 317.

## 5.2 Schuler's Theology

Since Schuler systematically developed his religious belief and theory, one must, by definition, speak of theology when referring to the edifice of ideas subsumed under the term *Kreatismus*.<sup>112</sup> This worldview was, after all, meant to replace Christianity – and it includes a notion of God, albeit one that is radically different from that of the Abrahamic religions. I shall start this chapter by summing up its ontology. Afterwards, I will deal with the political and ethical implications.

One of the main tenets of Schuler's *Kreatismus* is the unity of matter and spirit: "There can be no matter without spirit, but the reverse is also true."<sup>113</sup> Everything "spiritual" is inseparably connected with the body and its senses.<sup>114</sup> For Schuler, even atoms and subatomic particles have a sort of consciousness,<sup>115</sup> and he evokes quantum physics to make his point: "Subatomic particles seem to possess 'free will' and spirit in the higher sense. [...] They seem to guess what the researchers' intentions are, only to react in very different ways."<sup>116</sup> Since matter dissolves into energy and waves, it is "force" in which spirit and matter are "harmoniously wedded."<sup>117</sup> Moreover, according to Schuler, the borders between "living matter" and "dead matter" no longer exist. He credits the German zoologist Ernst Haeckel with this discovery.<sup>118</sup> Starting from this premise, he concludes that eternal death is an impossibility.<sup>119</sup> While Schuler, just like the ancient Epicureans and the dialectical materialists, is convinced that the soul (i.e. our consciousness) perishes with the body, he claims that "every being must be based on something permanent, something unmistakable."<sup>120</sup> He dubs this permanent entity *Urmonergon* and speculates that it is an "existential cosmic code."<sup>121</sup> He goes on to assert that

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<sup>112</sup> The *Merriam-Webster Dictionary* defines theology as "1) the study of religious faith, practice, and experience," such as "the study of God and of God's relation to the world," as well as "2) a theological theory or system [e.g. the *theology* of atonement] or "a distinctive body of theological opinion [e.g. Catholic *theology*]." *Merriam-Webster*, s.v. "theology," <https://www.merriam-webster.com/dictionary/theology> (accessed April 14, 2023).

<sup>113</sup> Schuler, *Zeitenwende*, 15.

<sup>114</sup> See Schuler, *Zeitenwende*, 16.

<sup>115</sup> See Schuler, *Zeitenwende*, 18.

<sup>116</sup> Schuler, *Zeitenwende*, 42f.

<sup>117</sup> Schuler, *Zeitenwende*, 59.

<sup>118</sup> See Schuler, *Kreatismus als geistige Revolution*, 347.

<sup>119</sup> See Schuler, *Kreatismus als geistige Revolution*, 346.

<sup>120</sup> Schuler, *Zeitenwende*, 27.

<sup>121</sup> Schuler, *Zeitenwende*, 28.

this *Urmonergon* constantly strives for higher embodiment: “Wir ‘suchen’ unsere Eltern!”<sup>122</sup> In the citation, “Wir” is identical with the postulated *Urmonergon*.

This brings us to the second fundamental axiom of Schuler’s theology: Reincarnation. For Schuler, reincarnation is a certainty because he deems it impossible that where once there was light, everything should now sink into eternal darkness.<sup>123</sup> According to him, it was the overwhelming feeling in almost all human beings that a life of maximum 80 years could not be all there was, that ensured the longevity of the Christian religion.<sup>124</sup> He writes: “The Christian churches very skillfully used and misused people’s anticipation, indeed knowledge, of resurrection and continued life in a different form after death.”<sup>125</sup> And in his final book on the matter, written a decade later, he asserts: “Typically a short, harsh, self-denying life and then – eternal nothingness! Such a bleak, choking perspective, such a hopeless outlook, instinctively repels people, which in itself proves that it cannot be true.”<sup>126</sup> As a side note, this of course proves nothing, and it was this type of “evidence” that kept me from ever fully embracing Schuler’s ontology, even as a teenager.

Having established reincarnation as a tenet of Kreatismus, it is easy to comprehend that Schuler declares the future Earth to be the actual afterworld.<sup>127</sup> However, the resurrection pertains only to the *Urmonergon*, not to the consciousness of any individual. This consciousness ceases to exist in good old atomistic fashion as soon as the brain stops operating. Schuler clearly tries to span the bridge between his religious claims regarding a purposeful universe and a scientific worldview. In Schuler’s opinion, “only philosophers who stand upon trifles, claim that the world has no purpose.”<sup>128</sup> He asserts: “Die Welt muss schließlich erkennbar, ‘intelligibel’ sein, weil der Gedanke ihrer absoluten Unerfaßbarkeit

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<sup>122</sup> Schuler, *Zeitenwende*, 35.

<sup>123</sup> See Schuler, *Bausteine für eine Religion der Zukunft*, 61.

<sup>124</sup> See Schuler, *Bausteine für eine Religion der Zukunft*, 41.

<sup>125</sup> Schuler, *Zeitenwende*, 141.

<sup>126</sup> Schuler, *Kreatismus als geistige Revolution*, 94f. He reiterates this point in the epilogue: “Wenn alle Wesen nur kurz auftauchen, um dann für immer und ewig in Nacht und Nichts zu verschwinden, versinkt das Dasein in vollständiger Absurdität. Die absolute Sinnlosigkeit bleibt jedoch für die Menschen unerträglich, nicht nur für die breiten Massen, sondern gerade auch für ernsthafte, forschende Geister.” Schuler, *Kreatismus als geistige Revolution*, 347. By evoking absurdity, Schuler is of course alluding to Albert Camus’ Absurdism without mentioning the philosopher.

<sup>127</sup> See Schuler, *Zeitenwende*, 141.

<sup>128</sup> Schuler, *Zeitenwende*, 79.

unerträglich **und** ein ontologischer Irrtum wäre."<sup>129</sup> This is another example for a questionable line of argument, for the asserted fact that this thought would be unbearable, in no way diminishes the credibility of the idea.<sup>130</sup> According to Schuler, it is the purpose of the universe to be able to reflect itself in the most perfect individual of the highest yet-to-come species, before it implodes and the whole cycle repeats itself. God is thus the *primus inter pares* "einer höchsten Spezies,"<sup>131</sup> the endpoint of a teleological evolution: "This God struggles with evolution, in evolution, and in conjunction with other beings, to the light of his self-awareness, which is also the self-awareness of the universe."<sup>132</sup> Needless to say, the concept of a teleological evolution is not the one put forth by Charles Darwin or contemporary biologists.

Schuler takes the idea of Nietzsche's *Übermensch* to a new level: God must be created.<sup>133</sup> "The divine is something that has yet to be realized in body, flesh and blood in a future higher type."<sup>134</sup> This is the axiom that both lends Kreatismus its name and outlines its political program: In Schuler's opinion, the tasks at hand are eugenics and the separation of the races in order to ensure the optimal outcome for the universe in the shortest time, so to speak, because the vanishing of the Europeans and East Asians, due to infertility and intermixing with other branches of humanity would be a step backwards, according to this view of evolution. In an article published in 2007, Schuler declares with regard to Europeans and White Americans, Australians etc.: "Without a decisive turning point, the blossom of the human kingdom [in analogy to the animal kingdom] will be lost in a few decades, and with it the biological basis for a creatistic upward development."<sup>135</sup>

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<sup>129</sup> Schuler, *Zeitenwende*, 62.

<sup>130</sup> Similarly, in *Kreatismus als geistige Revolution*, he claims: "[E]s wäre ganz und gar vernunftwidrig an sich, anzunehmen, daß der Kosmos ewige Male seine zyklischen Bahnen beschreiten würde, Weltjahr um Weltjahr, ohne jemals zur vollsten Klarheit über sein innerstes Wesen, über Sein und Sinn zu gelangen. Die Welt will und kann nicht ewig blind und taub bleiben." On the following page, he states: "Es wurde schon gesagt, daß diese ewige 'Blindheit' des Kosmos, die immerwährende Unkenntnis seiner selbst vernunftwidrig, undenkbar und daher unrealistisch wäre." Schuler, *Kreatismus als geistige Revolution*, 88f. It was asserted indeed, but it was not properly reasoned. It is hardly any more than an unfounded claim.

<sup>131</sup> Schuler, *Zeitenwende*, 92.

<sup>132</sup> Schuler, *Zeitenwende*, 65f.

<sup>133</sup> "Der Kreatismus ist somit ein Anruf und Aufruf zur Gotterschaffung, zur Gottwerdung, zur Menschengötterung über den 'Übermenschen' hinaus; denn die jetzige Stufe der Lebensentwicklung auf diesem Planeten ist noch weit vom Ziel und den Möglichkeiten irdischer Evolution entfernt." Schuler, *Zeitenwende*, 171.

<sup>134</sup> Schuler, *Kreatismus als geistige Revolution*, 74.

<sup>135</sup> Dietrich Schuler, "Überwindet das Christentum! Der Kreatismus – Eine neue Religion des Lebens," *Volk in Bewegung. Vierteljahresschrift für eine neue Ordnung* 2 (2007): 10.



Already in his 2000 book *Zeitenwende total*, he makes the course of action explicit: “Es gilt also, den Weg des Lebens nach oben, den der Weltprozeß sichtbar von den Urelementen bis zum europäischen Genie über tausend Rückschläge hinweg nur scheinbar ‘blind’ genommen hat, **nun ganz bewußt** weiterzuschreiten.”<sup>136</sup> Schuler envisions the transformation of our societies into a giant nursery, so that our inheritance might bear the promise of becoming God.<sup>137</sup> And this desired transformation is not limited to humans (in this case, Europeans), but also includes the environment. Schuler states: “But if our hereafter is the future of earth, then it can and must be our duty to make life on this glorious planet so ideal, healthy, and magnificent that we can truly be reborn into a higher world.”<sup>138</sup>

One may rightfully call this religion and worldview totalitarian for Schuler rejects the separation of powers as well as the separation of the religious and the political spheres. In his view, its laicism was one of the gravest mistakes of the Nazi regime: “The typical statement in any discussion of religion during the ‘12 years,’” says Schuler, “went something like this: ‘How a person imagines God is his private affair.’”<sup>139</sup> The only thing that mattered to the regime was whether the person concerned was “a good National Socialist.”<sup>140</sup> However, this *modus operandi*, according to Schuler, “only continued the centuries-old tradition of separating religion and politics, which is totally wrong and disastrous.”<sup>141</sup> Since a person cannot be split into a religious and a political subject, there ought to be no separation of religion and state. Moreover, the “fundamental transformation of everything that exists must,” in Schuler’s view, “include all spheres from art, science, politics, economics and law to education and sports.”<sup>142</sup> From the perspective of a Kreatist, all these spheres are inherently religious: “There are no more partitions. And every single act in the direction of something higher” is considered “worship.”<sup>143</sup>

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<sup>136</sup> Schuler, *Zeitenwende*, 79. Accordingly, in *Bausteine für eine Religion der Zukunft*, Schuler asserts: “Wir haben eine Phase der Evolution erreicht, in der wir das, was die Natur scheinbar blind und unbewußt seit Jahrmilliarden wirkt, nun bewußt in die Zukunft fortzuführen fähig sind.” Schuler, *Bausteine für eine Religion der Zukunft*, 103.

<sup>137</sup> See Schuler, *Zeitenwende*, 82.

<sup>138</sup> Schuler, *Zeitenwende*, 82.

<sup>139</sup> Schuler, *Bausteine für eine Religion der Zukunft*, 66.

<sup>140</sup> Schuler, *Bausteine für eine Religion der Zukunft*, 66.

<sup>141</sup> Schuler, *Bausteine für eine Religion der Zukunft*, 66.

<sup>142</sup> Schuler, *Zeitenwende*, 83.

<sup>143</sup> Schuler, *Zeitenwende*, 83f.

In the same vein, any deed to this effect is viewed as inherently ethical. After I had introduced Schuler to the moral guiding principles of the *Artgemeinschaft*, then headed by Jürgen Rieger, he adopted them for his religious project.<sup>144</sup> They include the following principles: “1) Safeguarding one's own honor and respecting the honor of one's equal venerable” and “4) Pride in one's own achievements and those of people of one's own kind, self-confidence, self-respect, self-affirmation and confidence.”<sup>145</sup> In a private conversation we had a few years before his death, he said that he had focused on Kreatismus' ontology so much that he had almost completely forgotten to ponder the question of moral guiding principles. This is ironic because his dissatisfaction with both the Jewish origins of Christianity *and* its morality was the reason for his inventing a new religion in the first place.

## 6 An Assessment of Schuler's Impact

I have already touched on Schuler's impact on the broader German neo-Nazi movement in the 2000s. However, before I will attempt to further assess this impact tentatively and subsequently raise the question why Kreatismus failed, I must briefly deal with a possible objection to its conception as a religion in this thesis. What may count as a religion and what not, has been the subject of fierce debate for centuries.<sup>146</sup> While the proponents of an intellectualist theory viewed “religion as an attempt to explain the world and so satisfy the inquiring intellect,”<sup>147</sup> Ludwig Feuerbach described it as “an illusion, the result of a psychological projection with imagined gods that could help humans cope in a harsh world,”<sup>148</sup> and Friedrich Nietzsche maintained that religion was simply “a means of exercising power.”<sup>149</sup> In 1912 finally, Émile Durkheim, who formally established the academic discipline of sociology,

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<sup>144</sup> See Schuler, *Kreatismus als geistige Revolution*, 301f. I had quoted them in full in a manuscript written for Thierry's *Verlags- und Medienhaus Hohenberg*. Although I had already signed an author contract and Schuler had made positive remarks, the book was never published because I soon grew discontent with its style.

<sup>145</sup> Cited in Schuler, *Kreatismus als geistige Revolution*, 301.

<sup>146</sup> And it is still ongoing. See, e.g. Markus Altena Davidsen's article in the *NTT* and the fierce responses it provoked: Markus Altena Davidsen, “Theo van Baaren's Systematic Science of Religion Revisited. The Current Crisis in Dutch Study of Religion and a Way Out,” *NTT Journal for Theology and the Study of Religion* 74, no. 3 (2020); Kocku von Stuckrad, “Institutional Histories, Identity Work, and Critical Theory,” *NTT Journal for Theology and the Study of Religion* 74, no. 3 (2020); Katja Rakow, “Of Bogeymen and The Promises of the Past or How to Construct a Uniform Identity,” *NTT Journal for Theology and the Study of Religion* 74, no. 3 (2020).

<sup>147</sup> Jeppe Sinding Jensen, *What Is Religion?* 2<sup>nd</sup> edition (London and New York: Routledge, 2020), 15.

<sup>148</sup> Jensen, *What Is Religion?*, 16.

<sup>149</sup> Jensen, *What Is Religion?*, 17.

stated that “[t]he division of the world into two comprehensive domains, one sacred, the other profane,” was “the hallmark of religious thought.”<sup>150</sup>

Many scholars of religion have since operated with this distinction, most prominently the Romanian historian of religions Mircea Eliade.<sup>151</sup> Another theory of religion is promoted in Martin Riesebrodt’s 2010 book *The Promise of Salvation*.<sup>152</sup> According to this theory, “the establishment of contact with superhuman powers” through prayers and rituals is essential.<sup>153</sup> He calls such actions “interventionist practices.”<sup>154</sup> Viewed through the lens of some of these theories, Kreatismus would *not* classify as a religion. However, Schuler and some of his readers clearly viewed Kreatismus as a religion. Moreover, it would be far-fetched to classify football and fandom as religious phenomena and negate the “religious nature” of a conscious attempt to go beyond skepticism in the effort to replace Christianity. While I agree with Jeppe Jensen that “[r]eligions typically attribute authority to invisible or abstract powers,”<sup>155</sup> my own definition of religion allows for Kreatismus to be studied as a religion that is simply atypical. As an admirer of Albert Camus’ philosophy, I suggest the following working definition: A religion is a system that provides meaning. It poses as the answer to existential questions. The meaning offered by Kreatismus lies in the pursuit of a yet-to-come species of gods, in which the universe might ultimately reflect itself.

### 6.1 The Impetus to Overcome the *Wüstenreligionen*

One is clearly able to notice an impetus to “overcome the desert religions” within parts of the German far right in the 2000s and the first half of the 2010s that stems from Schuler’s writings. Besides Pierre Krebs’ *Thule-Seminar*, Andreas Thierry’s *Verlags- & Medienhaus Hohenberg* was mainly responsible for this development. Starting in 2003, the company published and republished several of Schuler’s books. And while the anti-Christian literature of obscure neo-

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<sup>150</sup> Émile Durkheim, *The Elementary Forms of Religious Life*, trans. C. Cosman (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2001; originally published in French in 1912), 36.

<sup>151</sup> See, e.g. Mircea Eliade, *Das Heilige und das Profane. Vom Wesen des Religiösen*, 5<sup>th</sup> edition (Frankfurt a. M.: Suhrkamp Taschenbuch Verlag, 2016).

<sup>152</sup> The book was first published in German in 2007: Martin Riesebrodt, *Cultus und Heilsversprechen: Eine Theorie der Religionen* (München: Verlag C. H. Beck, 2007).

<sup>153</sup> Riesebrodt, *Promise of Salvation*, 78.

<sup>154</sup> Riesebrodt, *Promise of Salvation*, 75.

<sup>155</sup> Jensen, *What Is Religion?*, 9.

pagan groups did not manage to impact the broader German neo-Nazi movement, the books published by Thierry's company permeated the scene. In contrast, again, to literature of neo-pagan groups such as Rieger's *Artgemeinschaft*, or compared to Roland Bohlinger's reprints (facsimiles),<sup>156</sup> these books were both affordable and visually appealing. Furthermore, it was possible to order the books through *Deutsche Stimme*, then the newspaper (today it is a monthly magazine) and main publication of the National Democratic Party of Germany (*Nationaldemokratische Partei Deutschlands*). Since I do not know the actual sales figures, however, I can only offer anecdotal evidence for Thierry's success. One time, for instance, I had a girl who was barely involved in the far-right movement come up to me and say something along the lines of: "Have you read *Jesus: Europa's falscher Gott* yet? It's the best book I ever read. It really opened my eyes." I never met anyone who mentioned, say, Mathilde Ludendorff's philosophy out of the blue.

During the final decade of his life, Schuler actively campaigned for his new religious proposal, giving speeches at far-right gatherings and annual celebrations such as those commemorating Bismarck's *Reichsgründung* on January 18, 1871. Among far-right activists, he was not just viewed as a philosopher and religious thinker, but also as a historian since he had written two non-philosophical books, one regarding the potential decline and fall of the United States,<sup>157</sup> the other one dealing with anti-German sentiments in Europe and overseas.<sup>158</sup> After Schuler's death in 2011, Pierre Krebs' *Thule-Seminar* held its annual symposium (*Tafelrunde der freien Geister*) under the "spiritual patronage" of Dietrich Schuler. In the following years, a few attempts were made by his readers to form a religious group that would implement his Kreatismus. I vividly recall the first of these meetings. It was held in 2013 or 2014. About a dozen mainly elderly people were present. Andreas Thierry, one of Schuler's former publishers, had written a sort of mission statement and proposed the name of the group: "Life-Religious Community" (*Lebensreligiöse Gemeinschaft*). This proposal was not well-received by the chairman of the *Kolbenheyer-Gesellschaft*, Dr Hans Berger, and a long discussion ensued. In the end, not much was decided, and the only women present lamented that we had not

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<sup>156</sup> See, e.g. Hans Hauptmann, *Bolschewismus in der Bibel. Der Ursprung des Bolschewismus aus dem Mosaismus und dem Christentum* (Viöl: Verlag für ganzheitliche Forschung, 2002; first published in 1937).

<sup>157</sup> Dietrich Schuler, *Untergang der Weltmacht USA. Rettung für die weißen Völker?* (Kiel: Arndt, 2003).

<sup>158</sup> Dietrich Schuler, *Der Aufstand der Verpflanzten. Die Wurzeln des Antigermanismus in der Welt* (Tübingen: Grabert-Verlag, 1988).

even managed to sing a song. At a subsequent meeting in 2016, songs were sung and I recited a couple of satirical poems in which the Christian faith was ridiculed. I had self-published them shortly before the gathering.<sup>159</sup> At this meeting again, I was by far the youngest person present. The gender ratio was somewhat more balanced but still heavily male. It was the last such meeting I attended because I had become more and more alienated from the movement's anti-Semitism, while studying at the University of Heidelberg as well as the Center for Jewish Studies, where I was enrolled in a course on Zionism as an undergraduate. Although I was no longer actively involved with the movement, I am almost certain that the gathering in 2016 was the last attempt to unite the anti-Christian splinter groups within the German far right in the spirit (not the term, which most people seem to have disliked) of Schuler's *Kreatismus*. The high-water mark of his impact was probably between 2007 and 2012.

As mentioned before, in 2007, an entire issue of the journal *Volk in Bewegung* was dedicated to the perceived danger of Christianity and the necessity for Europeans to replace it with a new religion. In the journal's editorial, Andreas Thierry postulates: "Wir Europäer sollten uns aufmachen, einen eigenen, weltanschaulich-religiösen Weg zu beschreiten, jenseits der monotheistischen Offenbarungsreligionen."<sup>160</sup> I myself contributed to the issue with an article titled "Langzeitgift christliche Moral. Von der ungebrochenen Dominanz christlicher Wertvorstellungen."<sup>161</sup> That liberalism and Marxism are both secularized Christianity,<sup>162</sup> was a lesson Schuler had taught me, and although I do not quote him in the article but refer to Nietzsche, Socrates, Francis Hutcheson, David Hume and the Harvard psychologist Marc Hauser instead, Schuler's interpretation of Christianity is implicitly present in almost every paragraph, especially when it comes to the "absolutizing of female values."<sup>163</sup> But it was also the conspiracy theory that stuck for a while. I shall turn to this aspect in the following chapter.

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<sup>159</sup> Jonathan Alan Stumpf, *Ketzerballaden. Spottgedichte eines Antichristen* (Heidelberg: Selbstverlag, 2016).

<sup>160</sup> Andreas Thierry, "Schluß mit den faulen Kompromissen!," *Volk in Bewegung. Vierteljahresschrift für eine neue Ordnung* 2 (2007): 3.

<sup>161</sup> Jonathan Stumpf, "Langzeitgift christliche Moral. Von der ungebrochenen Dominanz christlicher Wertvorstellungen," *Volk in Bewegung. Vierteljahresschrift für eine neue Ordnung* 2 (2007): 20-23.

<sup>162</sup> Stumpf, "Langzeitgift," 20.

<sup>163</sup> Stumpf, "Langzeitgift," 22f.

## 6.2 The Conspiracy Theory in *Die Drohnen*

When on night duty as an American soldier with the 2<sup>nd</sup> Cavalry Regiment at Rose Barracks in Vilseck, Bavaria, on December 30, 2013, I wrote a fable titled *Die Drohnen* (The Drones) that was published in *Kassandrarufe. Fabeln wider den Zeitgeist* a year and a half later.<sup>164</sup> It is one of the few unequivocally anti-Semitic pieces of “literature” I have produced, and it was directly inspired by Schuler’s conspiracy narrative, i.e. the alleged Jewish world domination as a result of Christianity. Although I have written many things in the past I now disagree with, this fable features among the one or two writings I am actually ashamed of.

The fable starts like this: “I dreamed at night of a bee colony whose strange history I am determined, for many reasons, to write down; not least because I thought I discovered all too human traits in the behavioral patterns of the imagined bees when I got out of bed [...] – still aware of the bad dream.”<sup>165</sup> The dream’s protagonist is a worker bee named Lotte. After delivering her nectar to the drones, she asks a fellow worker bee: “Tell me, Sonja, why are we delivering everything we collect outside to the drones?”<sup>166</sup> The other bee then makes fun of Lotte for apparently not knowing the hive’s history: “You believe in the drone Jupp who once died for the tribe and has been in charge of the fate of the bees in Heaven ever since, don’t you?”<sup>167</sup> Sonja subsequently lectures Lotte on the fact that it is considered to be blasphemous and even a criminal offense to speak badly of the drones, who are His people: “He has appointed the drones to be stewards of the honey, and it is not for us to question His orders. After all,” Sonja goes on, “according to His [...] teaching, it is advisable to tear off a wing if it tempts you to fall away from Him, for it is better to come with one wing into the Heavenly hive, where there is no more sorrow and misery, than to keep both, but find your way to Hell, where a great hornet is in charge.”<sup>168</sup> Lotte, however, is not satisfied with this explanation and comes to suspect that the drones have created this martyr called Jupp out of thin air. After delivering her honey to them the next time, she hides in a honeycomb. As she overhears the conversation of two drones that confirms her suspicions, she starts flapping her wings because

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<sup>164</sup> Johannes Scharf, *Kassandrarufe. Fabeln wider den Zeitgeist* (Wahlsburg: Klosterhaus-Verlag, 2015).

<sup>165</sup> Scharf, *Kassandrarufe*, 53.

<sup>166</sup> Scharf, *Kassandrarufe*, 53.

<sup>167</sup> Scharf, *Kassandrarufe*, 54.

<sup>168</sup> Scharf, *Kassandrarufe*, 55.

she is unable to control her emotions. This leads to her being discovered. At this point the nightmare is over.

It is, of course, no wonder that the attempt to replace Christianity with an anti-Semitic religion in 21<sup>st</sup>-century Germany was destined to fail. Why Kreatismus did not have an impact on German society at large, is not the question I am posing. The interesting and potentially fruitful question from a religious-studies perspective is: Why did Schuler's religious proposal not catch on with anti-Semites? More specifically, why did it not catch on with anti-Semites who believed the conspiracy narrative and, like Schuler, felt the need to replace Christianity with a new religion?

While I never fully accepted Schuler's ontology, I did buy into the conspiracy narrative and I believed that it was of utmost importance for Europe to rid itself of Christianity. Likewise, many of Schuler's readers I talked to over the course of a decade or so, fully agreed with his negative verdict regarding Christianity and were eager to replace it with something new. However, they too, had doubts that the alternative Schuler offered was "true." First and foremost, they rejected Schuler's claim of reincarnation or found the presupposed existence of an *Urmonergon* too speculative. This was probably the case with the bulk of Schuler's readers who were atheists and philosophical materialists. In the following chapter, I will ponder the question why the more spiritually minded among his readers might have rejected the alternative to Christianity he proposed. However, first I will outline Rodney Stark's sociological model of failure and success among religious movements and attempt to explain the failure of Kreatismus in the way this model suggests.

### 6.3 The Failed Attempt to Establish a New Religion

Rodney Stark sought to identify the factors that led to the tremendous success of religions such as Christianity, Islam and Mormonism.<sup>169</sup> This success is all the more stunning as "probably no more than one religious movement out of 1000 will attract more than 100,000 followers and last for as long as a century."<sup>170</sup> His theory consists of ten conditions he deems

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<sup>169</sup> See Stark, "Why Religious Movements Succeed or Fail," 134.

<sup>170</sup> Stark, "Why Religious Movements Succeed or Fail," 133.

necessary and sufficient for a religious movement to succeed. As mentioned in the introduction, only three of these propositions pertain to the content or theology of a religion. “Other things being equal,” writes Stark, “religious movements will succeed to the degree that:

1. They retain cultural continuity with the conventional faiths of the societies within which they seek converts.
2. Their doctrines are non-empirical.
3. They maintain a medium level of tension with their surrounding environment – are strict, but not too strict.
4. They have legitimate leaders with adequate authority to be effective.
  - (4a) Adequate authority requires clear doctrinal justifications for an effective and legitimate leadership.
  - (4b) Authority is regarded as more legitimate and gains in effectiveness to the degree that members perceive themselves as participants in the system of authority.
5. They can generate a highly motivated, volunteer, religious labor force, including many willing to proselytise.
6. They maintain a level of fertility sufficient to at least offset member mortality.
7. They compete against weak, local conventional religious organisations within a relatively unregulated religious economy.
8. They sustain strong internal attachments, while remaining an open social network, able to maintain and form ties to outsiders.
9. They continue to maintain sufficient tension with their environment – remain sufficiently strict.
10. They socialise the young sufficiently well as to minimise both defection and the appeal of reduced strictness.”<sup>171</sup>

While some of Stark’s propositions, like the one regarding the level of fertility or that concerning the socialization of youngsters, only come into play once a religious community has already successfully managed to establish itself as a distinct group, others are effective from the start. One of these is the first proposition. Whoever is socialized into a particular

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<sup>171</sup> Stark, “Why Religious Movements Succeed or Fail,” 144f.



culture, also invests in this culture. Time and effort are expended “in learning, understanding and remembering cultural material.”<sup>172</sup> Thus, if “faced with the option of shifting religions, the maximisation of cultural capital leads people to prefer to save as much of their cultural capital as possible.”<sup>173</sup> Rodney Stark provides the example of a young person who has a Christian background and is contemplating whether to join the Mormons or the Hare Krishnas. Since he will retain most of his cultural capital and simply add to it when joining the former, he is more likely to become a Mormon. The reverse is, of course, true in a Hindu context.<sup>174</sup>

In the case of Schuler’s Kreatismus, a follower with a Christian background would have to throw overboard every bit of cultural capital. Moreover, such a person would have to regard every trace of it as evil and perilous. Even if not consciously labelled “Christian,” attitudes and moral responses could be the result of this cultural capital. A person adhering to Kreatismus would have to constantly question whether an emotion or a moral judgment might stem from Christian morality. This is extremely costly with regard to cultural capital. Someone who believes in the Aryan-Jesus hypothesis, on the other hand, gets to keep much of the cultural capital he or she has invested in prior to subscribing to the new faith. It is a relatively uncostly modification. Such a belief would, using Rodney Stark’s model, have a clear advantage over the costlier one.<sup>175</sup>

Another proposition in Stark’s framework that can help to explain the obvious failure of Kreatismus within the German neo-Nazi movement, is proposition 4a. Schuler offers no “clear doctrinal justifications for an effective and legitimate leadership.” Even though most of his readers who were inclined to establish a new religion would have probably accepted Schuler’s leadership, he does not raise such practical questions in his writings at all. After his death, his former publisher Andreas Thierry would have been the likeliest candidate to assume command, he himself being a charismatic person and excellent speaker. However, although he clearly tried to do exactly that, the movement was doomed to fail. Two sociological factors

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<sup>172</sup> Stark, “Why Religious Movements Succeed or Fail,” 135.

<sup>173</sup> Stark, “Why Religious Movements Succeed or Fail,” 135. See also Laurence R. Innaccone, “Religious Practice: A Human Capital Approach,” *Journal for the Scientific Study of Religion* 29, no. 3 (1990) and Darren E. Sherkat and John Wilson, “Preferences, Constraints, and Choices in Religious Markets: An Examination of Religious Switching and Apostasy,” *Social Forces* 73, no. 3 (1995).

<sup>174</sup> See Stark, “Why Religious Movements Succeed or Fail,” 135.

<sup>175</sup> This may be the reason why the “Aryanized” version of Christianity was much more successful than neo-pagan attempts to replace Christianity during the Third Reich.

in Rodney Stark's framework can help to further explain this lack of success: Propositions 6 and 10. Since most of Schuler's readers who appeared at the post-mortem meetings in which the establishment of a religious group was discussed were beyond the age of retirement, the question of sufficient fertility was obsolete. Dr Hans Berger, for instance, died in 2018, aged 77. Dr Carlos Alberto Dufour, who was among the most active anti-Christian intellectuals in the German neo-Nazi movement and a regular contributor to *Volk in Bewegung*, has likewise passed away. At the same time, Dietrich Schuler was unsuccessful in persuading even his own children that Kreatismus was the order of the day.

While all the above propositions might suffice to explain the non-success of Schuler's proposed religion, I am inclined to believe that the main reason for its failure to attract devout followers among the more spiritually minded readers of Schuler's books is of a doctrinal nature and nowhere to be found in Stark's framework.<sup>176</sup> The so-called *Urmonergon* that is supposed to survive death is just a specific "code" somewhere at the interface of spirit and matter. It has absolutely nothing to do with our notion of the soul or individual consciousness. In Schuler's Kreatismus, soul or consciousness cease to exist when a person dies. Naturally, there is not much comfort in such a religion compared to religions that speak of salvation and eternal bliss. To me, it seems far from coincidental that the most successful religions and sects, Christianity, Islam, Mormons, Jehovah's Witnesses and others, are similar in this regard. Furthermore, in Schuler's Kreatismus, there are no supernatural powers followers could turn to "for protection, help, and blessings."<sup>177</sup> In Riesebrodt's opinion, by "bringing threats into significant relation to superhuman powers, people can attempt, by communicating with these powers, to actively manage such situations rather than panicking or despairing."<sup>178</sup> Although I disagree with Riesebrodt's assertion that "all religions claim to have the ability to avert misfortune, overcome crisis, and provide salvation,"<sup>179</sup> this is most certainly true of the more successful ones. I thus propose to extend Stark's useful framework by adding the following propositions:

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<sup>176</sup> Stark himself concedes that while his propositions "may be necessary conditions for success, they may not be the sufficient conditions. That is, more propositions may need to be added." Stark, "Why Religious Movements Succeed or Fail," 144.

<sup>177</sup> Riesebrodt, *Promise of Salvation*, 95.

<sup>178</sup> Riesebrodt, *Promise of Salvation*, 172.

<sup>179</sup> Riesebrodt, *Promise of Salvation*, 89.

11. Religious movements will be more successful if they offer to ward off misfortune, help to overcome crises and provide blessings via the communication with superhuman powers.
12. They will be more successful if they maintain that the soul lives on once the body dies and offer ways of obtaining individual salvation.

Cicero lamented that “without great hope for immortality no one would ever give his life for his country.”<sup>180</sup> Likewise, a religious movement that upheld a solely materialistic worldview would have a hard time producing martyrs. As to the first proposition I added, I find it noteworthy that this feature is particularly pronounced in Pentecostalism, which is “the only Christian movement that even begins to match the explosive growth of Islam in the ‘developing’ regions of the globe.”<sup>181</sup> In Pentecostalism, the Holy Spirit is viewed as a powerful ally in achieving one’s goals in life. There is a particularly strong “belief in the presence of the supernatural in everyday life.”<sup>182</sup> When I attended a Sunday service of the Redeemed Christian Church of God, a Pentecostal church from Nigeria, in The Hague in October 2022, about a dozen people gave testimony of the working of the Holy Spirit in front of the congregation. While many thanked God for the invitation to a job interview, a more prestigious job they had prayed for or academic success, one young man said he had recently bought a house and then found out it was about 10,000 euro worth more than what he had paid. Everyone started and ended their testimonies with the phrase “Praise the Lord,” to which the congregation responded in the same vein. When the lucky house owner had told his story, the pastor doubled down on his testimony, exclaiming: “It’s always like that! Believe me, this is not the last house you will buy!” Kreatismus, on the other hand, has nothing of the kind to offer to potential followers.

As Teemu Taira points out in an article, “one of the most common legitimation strategies” of movements that brand themselves as religions is to “argue that they are a direct continuation

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<sup>180</sup> Cited in Anthony M. Esolen, *Lucretius. On the Nature of Things*. De rerum natura (Baltimore and London: The Johns Hopkins University Press, 1995), 18.

<sup>181</sup> Bernice Martin, “A Pentecostal Modernity? Response to Charles Taylor’s ‘A Catholic Modernity?’,” *NTT Journal for Theology and the Study of Religion* 75, no. 3/4 (2021): 345.

<sup>182</sup> Rice, “Mission From Africa.”

of an ancient tradition or a modern rehabilitation of one.”<sup>183</sup> Kreatismus, however, was invented from scratch and its creator did not feel the need to veil this fact. Quite to the contrary. The third addition to Stark’s model that I propose, albeit with less confidence than the first two, thus reads:

13. Other things being equal, religious movements will be more successful if they maintain that they represent an ancient tradition or are, in fact, a modern rehabilitation of such a tradition.

Furthermore, drawing on Stark’s own 1987 theory of religion, I would like to add one more proposition pertaining to the theology of a given religion:

14. Religious movements that assume the superhuman powers, on whose existence they insist, act rationally will be more successful than others because they offer greater certainty of reward.<sup>184</sup>

In Schuler’s theology, no individual rewards can be expected – neither in this world nor in another. Even if our individual *Urmonergon* was indeed able to reincarnate itself in a higher being one day, what is that to us? We will never know since our conscious will have ceased to exist a long time ago.

## 7 Conclusion

In this thesis, I have introduced a religion that failed to attract followers even among the people who were, ideologically, inclined to replace Christianity with something new, their main “argument” against Christianity pertaining to its Jewish roots. Of course, such views did not develop in a void. To provide the reader with the necessary context, I sketched the history of anti-Semitic anti-Christianism in Germany, beginning with the *völkisch* movement. After

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<sup>183</sup> Teemu Taira, “The Category of ‘Invented Religion’: A New Opportunity for Studying Discourses on ‘Religion’,” *Culture and Religion* 14, no. 4 (2013): 479.

<sup>184</sup> Rodney Stark and William Sims Bainbridge state: “P107 Explanations that assume the gods are rational offer greater certainty of reward than explanations that assume the gods are irrational.” Rodney Stark and William Sims Bainbridge, *A Theory of Religion*, New Brunswick, NJ: Rutgers University Press, 1996; originally published in 1987, 336.

thoroughly examining Dietrich Schuler's theology, I assessed the influence of his writings on the German anti-Christian far right in the first two decades of the current millennium. While many German neo-Nazis agreed with Schuler's negative depiction of Christianity and his verdict that it ensured "Jewish world domination," they did not "convert" to Schuler's Kreatismus for various reasons. In other words, his secular disciples did not become believers. On the one hand, the materialists among his readers rejected the tenet of reincarnation or found the presupposed existence of an *Urmonergon* too speculative. This, of course, is hardly a surprise. On the other hand, the more-spiritually minded individuals who engaged with Schuler's religious proposal also, by and large, did not become practicing Kreatists. When attempting to answer the question why this was the case, I chiefly drew on Rodney Stark's 1996 article "Why Religious Movements Succeed or Fail" and Martin Riesebrodt's book *The Promise of Salvation*.

By combining the two approaches toward religion, Kreatismus serving as a case study, I arrived at the conclusion that Stark's sociological model may indeed help to explain the non-success of Kreatismus, but that the main reasons for its failure were more likely to be content-based. In my opinion, they were theological. I thus added four propositions of my own to Stark's framework, hitherto consisting of ten propositions. All other things being equal, I predict that religious movements will be more successful if they

1. offer to ward off misfortune, help to overcome crises and provide blessings via the communication with superhuman powers;
2. maintain that the soul lives on once the body dies and offer ways of obtaining individual salvation;
3. maintain that they represent an ancient tradition or are, in fact, a modern rehabilitation of such a tradition;
4. assume the superhuman powers, on whose existence they insist, act rationally because this would increase the certainty of reward.

While the presupposed teleological evolution in Schuler's ontology could be perhaps viewed as a superhuman power of some sort, there are no individual rewards to be reaped, neither in this world nor in another, for the soul dies with the body and there are no superhuman

powers an adherent of Kreatismus could turn to “for protection, help, and blessings.”<sup>185</sup> I do not claim that my additions to Stark’s model complete the theory. However, the only way to find out whether other propositions should be added or some of them must be discarded, is to apply the framework to other groups. Future avenues of research could include a comparison of Dietrich Schuler’s “Kreatismus” with William Luther Pierce’ “Cosmotheism” and Ben Klassen’s “Creativity.” Both being White supremacists, naturalists and what Max Weber would have described as “tone deaf” to religion,<sup>186</sup> they, too, tried to found religions. Perhaps not surprisingly, Schuler and Pierce were acquaintances.

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<sup>185</sup> Riesebrodt, *Promise of Salvation*, 95.

<sup>186</sup> See Herbert Will, “Religiös absolut ‘unmusikalisch’ – Max Weber und der Bruch im modernen Subjekt,” *Psyche* 63, no. 9/10 (2009).

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