

An Upbringing According to Strict Religious and Military Principles - And the Reflex of Absolute Spiritual Obedience: The Example of Auschwitz Commander Rudolf Höß

Part III / Conclusion

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The handwritten notes of **Rudolf Höß** (1901-1947) "*Meine Psyche. **Becoming, Life and Past Life***" (14) – written down during his imprisonment in Krakow in 1946 – give the reader an insight into the abysses of human behaviour. Höß experienced an upbringing according to strict religious and military principles in his childhood and reacted as an adult with "cadaver obedience". The editor of the autobiography, Martin Broszat, writes in the introduction:

"The 'ideal' commanders of the concentration camps in the sense of National Socialism were ultimately not the personally brutal, dissolute and derelict creatures in the SS, but Höß and his ilk. Their 'self-sacrificing devotion' to concentration camp service and their never-resting activity made the camp system workable, thanks to their 'conscientiousness' could appear as an institution of order and education, which was an instrument of terror. And they were the suitable executioners of that form of hygienic mass murder which allowed thousands of people to be killed without the feeling of murder." (Book, p. 43)

Höß had been animated by 'robotic devotion to duty' to the service in the concentration camp and someone who ruthlessly asserted himself, did not shy away from any order, but remained personally 'decent' (p. 20 f.). He had been brought up in cadaver obedience, who had allowed himself to be persuaded by his superiors during many years of training that the liquidation of hundreds of thousands of people or the extermination of "racial-biological foreign bodies and pests of the people" was a service to the people and the fatherland or a necessary act of völkisch-national "pest control" (p. 22).

When **Heinrich Himmler**, Reichsführer of the Schutzstaffel (SS) gave Höß the order in 1941 "to prepare a place for mass extermination in Auschwitz and to carry out this extermination", Höß reacted in the same way as he had learned in childhood with his father:

"I did not make any considerations at that time – I had received the order – and had to carry it out. Whether this mass extermination of the Jews was necessary or not, I could not allow myself to judge, I could not see that far: If the Führer himself had ordered the 'Final Solution of the Jewish Question', there were no considerations for a National Socialist, even less for an SS leader. 'Führer commanded, we follow' – was by no means a phrase, not a slogan for us. It was bitterly serious." (S. 186)

When he was repeatedly told after his arrest that he could have refused this order or "shot Himmler over the head", Höß contradicted himself and said:

"His person as RFSS (Reichsführer der SS) was untouchable. His fundamental orders in the name of the Führer were sacred. There were no considerations, no interpretations, no interpretations of them. They were carried out to the last consequence, even if it was by deliberate surrender of life, as not a few SS leaders did during the war." (S. 187)

Rudolf Höß was a nice person, a decent petit bourgeois. **He describes that he obeyed as a matter of course.** He was, after all, a soldier, a well-bred person who listened to Hitler. He calmly enumerated: So, what do I know, 20,000 Russians gassed, then the Jews, then the Socialists and the others, the Freemasons. He worked diligently and everything was in order because he reached the maximum number of gassings and ran the camp well to the satisfaction of Hitler and his generals.

In court in Nuremberg he was accused of having had whole districts in the Ukraine exterminated. He replied: Yes, so that there would be room for the German nation. Hitler had gone out to make room, he said. When Germany develops, the Germans will be settled in the Ukraine. Now the judge asked why he had not protested against this. Höß responded indignantly: *"I'm not a mutineer. I am a soldier!"* (S. 19)

That was his attitude: he is a soldier and not a mutineer. That is Rudolf Höß – and so are we. If we identify with the camp leader and are careful because we experienced a similar upbringing as he did and therefore have a similar mindset in our soul, in our mind, then we begin to recognise ourselves, become calmer and make progress in our personality development.

Höß found the atmosphere in his parental home deeply religious. His father had been a fanatical Catholic who took a vow to raise his son to be a clergyman through great strictness (p. 33). Because of his religious convictions, his father was a staunch opponent of the imperial government and its policies, but nevertheless believed that, despite all opposition, the laws and orders of the state had to be obeyed at all costs (p. 35).

Now, it is an insight of scientific psychology that we humans as adults by and large only have at our disposal what we have received from our educators in the course of our childhood. In Höß's case, these were religious and soldierly "virtues" such as blind obedience, fulfilment of duty and not questioning "higher" orders.

Höß himself recalled: *"I was brought up by my father according to strict military principles."* (p. 33) He was convinced that these educational principles had become second nature to him. Little Rudolf had to obey the wishes and orders of parents, teachers and priests without delay. What the adults said was always right and not to be questioned. All orders from the parents were to be carried out precisely and conscientiously, the orders and wishes of the father were to be followed scrupulously (p. 34 f.).

Such an authoritarian upbringing makes it impossible for the child to develop genuine parental love and trust in fellow human beings. It isolates itself internally and remains alone with its worries. This is what happened to Höß:

"Although both parents were very devoted to me, I could never find my way to them in all the big and small sorrows that occasionally weigh down a boy's heart. I dealt with all this on my own. My only confidant was my Hans (Pony) – and he understood me, according to me." (S. 36)

Even though he respected his parents very much and looked up to them with adoration, he did not muster any genuine parental love for them. From an early age, therefore, he rejected any show of affection – much to his mother's regret (p. 35). He became a loner and an animal lover. In contrast, Höß describes his two older sisters as very cuddly and always around their mother. These sisters, however, had always remained strangers to him, he had never been able to muster a warm feeling for them (p. 36).

The Influence of Society on the Religious Attitude of Man

Man is not only a natural being, but also a socialised being. This means that his so-called metaphysical need to believe in a supersensible being is also influenced and directed by social factors: By class factors, especially economic factors. Religion will therefore exist as

long as material and thus mental and spiritual need exists.

Already **Ludwig Feuerbach** (1804-1872), German philosopher, anthropologist and critic of religion, whose epistemological standpoint has become fundamental for modern human sciences such as psychology and ethnology, demands that man must finally stop being a plaything of the anti-human powers that use religion for oppression:

“We see man bent under the burden of creatures which are but products of his own unfree and fearful mind, ignorant and uneducated intellect. If we replace the love of God with the love of man, if we replace the faith in God with the faith of man in himself, in his own power, we shall turn believers into thinkers, prayers into workers, candidates of the hereafter into students of the hereafter, and we shall at last be able to become whole men.” (15)

Karl Marx (1818-1883) saw through the gears of society and came to the conclusion that man could not change until the structure of society changed. As long as everyone could not live humanely and without fear in this world, there would be a belief in a better hereafter, in a compensatory justice. Therefore, he opined:

“Religion is the pursuit of illusory happiness of the people, springing from a state of society which needs illusion.” (16)

Marx clearly outlined the analysis of “this world” and recognised the significance of the division of society into classes. Only in the dismantling of the capitalist social order did he see the possibility of a consequent dismantling of religious needs and the disempowerment of the churches. According to Marx, these churches have influence and power primarily because of their material possessions, which are guaranteed to them by the feudal and capitalist social order.

Demands on schools and universities as public institutions

Religion and any other kind of occultism are a private matter for parents and their children; they must therefore be rejected as a special subject at school. The school must be non-denominational. The Bible – like any other faith programme of a superstitious nature – also does not belong in school. If at all, then only as a cultural document, knowledge of which is necessary for general education, but not as a dogma, as a fundamental normative doctrinal statement whose claim to truth is considered irrefutable. The school must first and foremost convey the conviction that experiential knowledge, understanding and reason always and everywhere have priority.

The churches justify the Christian school, among other things, with the “religious disposition” of the child and run up a storm against a scientific school. The church knows very well that it has to press the child’s soul into the orbit of the respective denomination in order to get hold of the soul of the human being for life.

Another justified demand is the restriction of theology to seminaries. Only a faculty of religious studies should be allowed at universities. Theology does not have the rank of a science. A theologian who first tries to scientifically investigate whether his God and dogmas really exist rightly would saw off the branch he is sitting on and would no longer be a theologian, but a religious scientist.

Outlook

The adult human being is often inhibited in his ego development, but is in bondage to the priests and suggestible. If the believing adult thinks he can reconcile his religious convictions with his “common sense”, he is mistaken. What he understands by “common sense” is nothing more than a hardened mass of dead metaphysics.

So many adults not only lack “common sense”, they even have to constantly fight down the remnants of their intellect in worldview discussions and be dishonest with themselves. And this is because not the slightest proof has been produced for the existence of an extra-worldly being that participates in man’s destiny.

The religious teachings of the Church presuppose the world view of primitive man. This prerequisite is no longer given today by modern science. We seek and find the “divine”, the ideal in nature, in the lawful, no longer in the mystical. We must no longer allow ourselves to be distracted from a vague transcendent by wonderful fables and should work for the real this world.

In education, we must impart values to the youth from the very beginning that correspond to our present day and are still valid in adulthood. We must not burden the youth with mysticism, which they often throw overboard later. Above all, we must always bear in mind the fact that many religious people no longer show any scientific interest, that their natural thirst for knowledge has already been quenched by religion, and that religious education has dulled some people and whole nations to the beauties of nature and art.

Moreover, legal protection of the health of soul and spirit must be demanded. The interest of the state has to lie not only in the physical but also in the mental-spiritual hygiene of its citizens. A paragraph in the law is to be demanded which protects the child’s soul from the rape of frightening occult teachings or those which damage the ability to think logically.

Representatives of occult teachings who base their existence on the intimidation of reason may protest against this and invoke freedom of speech and democracy. But what is recognised as harmful to the people cannot be democratic. The struggle between truth and delusion is “deadly serious”.

The school that teaches pupils the unconditional connection between religious dogma and morality has the task of also placing morality on an earthly basis. The pupil must be shown that high ethics also exist without beliefs and existed in various countries thousands of years ago. He must be shown that the justification of ethical teachings from an inner drive and the social coexistence of people is at least as understandable and compelling as the religious justification. Not every religious person is also a moral person.

We should help the young person to develop his own nature without being constricted by a denomination. This person will generally also be moral, because since he lives in harmony with himself, he also lives in harmony with his environment.

The school, too, has to strengthen one’s own strength and self-confidence, to divert attention from one’s own beloved salvation to the salvation of the general public, to the necessity of helpfulness, to an ideal which no longer sees the highest moral force in the religious but in the social idea, in the creation of a “paradise” of humanity on earth.

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Notes

(14) Broszat, Martin (ed.). (1963). Commandant at Auschwitz. Autobiographical notes of Rudolf Höß. Munich

(15) <https://de.wikipedia.org/wiki/Ludwig...Feuerbach>

(16) <https://de.wikipedia.org/wiki/Die...deutsche...Ideologie>

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