

Kuwait, Jordan, and Saudi Arabia). Not all of the 10,000 respondents were Muslims, or even citizens of the countries in which they were residing. Four excluded countries (India, Bangladesh, Egypt, and Nigeria) each have more Muslim residents than many of the countries included.

The dismaying overall figures cited by the news media, the council points out, were the averages for the countries without regard to the size of their Muslim populations. Thus, Kuwait, with fewer than two million Muslims, was treated the same as Indonesia, with more than 200 million. Yet 36 percent

of those interviewed in Kuwait regarded the September 11 terrorist attacks as morally justified, while only four percent of Indonesians did.

Though the council spanked only *USA Today* and CNN, it “could just as easily” have given a whack or two to the Gallup Organization, observe Morin and Deane, director and assistant director, respectively, of polling at *The Washington Post*. “As Gallup now acknowledges, it initially provided reporters with the sensational [overall figures] that were the primary target of [the council’s] criticism.”

RELIGION & PHILOSOPHY

Hitler's Faith

“Totalitarianism: Between Religion and Science” by Tzvetan Todorov, in *Totalitarian Movements and Political Religions* (Summer 2001), Frank Cass & Co. Ltd., Crown House, 47 Chase Side, London N14 5BP, England.

What keeps utopian dreamers dreaming (and scheming) is their certain belief that perfection can be attained in this world. Alas, it is this conviction that led in the past century to the enslavement and slaughter of millions upon millions, and to misery for countless others.

The totalitarianism of Hitler, Lenin, and others, writes Todorov, the research director of the Centre National de la Recherche Scientifique in Paris, is a species of utopianism. “When seen in the perspective of European history, utopianism is in turn revealed as an atheistic millennialism.”

The Christian millennial movements that sprang up beginning in the 13th century held, contrary to traditional Christian teaching, that the Messiah would appear imminently to establish his kingdom on earth and that believers would achieve salvation in this world. The totalitarian “isms” were millennial movements that replaced God with the doctrine of scientism—an “excrescence on the body of science” whose origins Todorov traces to René Descartes (1596–1650). “Scientism takes as its point of departure a hypothesis about the structure of the world—that it is entirely coherent. Thus, as though the world were transparent, it can be known by human reason. . . . No part of the world—material, spiritual, animate, or inanimate—can escape the grasp of science.”

Scientism, explains Todorov, “rests on the existence of science, but it is not in itself scientific. Its underlying assumption, the total transparency of reality, cannot be proved or disproved. . . . At both its foundations and its summit, scientism demands an act of faith. . . . This is why totalitarian regimes can adopt scientism without necessarily encouraging scientific research. They have good reason not to since this would require submission solely to the quest for truth rather than to dogma.”

One of the first thinkers to see the implications of scientism was the French philologist Ernst Renan. In his remarkable *Philosophical Dialogue* (1871), he envisioned a world ruled by “positivist tyrants,” endowed by reason and science with the power to divine the rules of nature and extend them over all of society. “The being who possesses science puts limitless terror into the service of truth,” Renan declared. Leaders should have at their disposal men who were “obedient machines, indifferent to moral repugnance and capable of every type of ferocity.”

The allure of such visions is that they promise to give meaning and purpose to human life, Todorov observes. “Democracy does not fulfill the need for salvation or for the absolute; it cannot, on the other hand, afford to disregard its existence.”