Chapter 24

Charisma and revelation

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On charisma

The PP provokes in others a reaction that leans toward extremes; either marked rejection (the aspect most widely captured by clinical descriptions) or the deepest sympathy and allegiance.

> Paranoid personality
>
> Tends to provoke in others extreme reactions… (33).

Probably some PPs only trigger the first of these reactions (rejection), but others, at least with some interlocutors, display an unsurpassable ability to seduce.

> Reformers
>
> [...] a great faculty of persuasion and seduction of the masses, and a surprising ease in turning events to their advantage as they unfold… (6).

> Sectarian groups. The Reverend Jones's People's Temple
>
> To understand the magnetism that Jones radiated, one must know how he interwove his appeal to humanitarian purposes with captivating phrases... (19).

We speak here of *charisma* to refer to that gift which allows some PPs to attract followers, to convince in a swift, uncritical, and unexpected manner, to increase allegiances, and ultimately to enthuse their proselytes.

> Sectarian Groups. Reverend Jones's People's Temple
>
> It is difficult to describe his capacity for fascination —Tom Dickson, a 53-year-old former addict, now reflects—, but he knew how to convince people that he was what he really was not. He was agreeable, spoke well, possessed an undeniable appeal. Dynamic in voice and gesture, he knew how to assert himself and mastered the art of raising his voice at the right moment or of speaking softly when the situation called for it (19).

It may be that if some incipient nationalisms came to be genuine mass movements, it was as a consequence of the preachings of some charismatic leader.

> Irish nationalism

> Contemporary Irish nationalism emerged at the hands of a lawyer of peasant origin, Daniel O'Connell, who with his Catholic Association, clearly identifying nationalism and Catholicism, initiated from 1823 onwards a broad campaign of rallies and mobilizations among the poorest peasantry, which in addition to making him a true charismatic leader, managed to awaken the political consciousness of numerous sectors of the Catholic Irish population (25).

It may also be that if some nationalisms (such as Breton or Cornish) never managed to captivate more than an exiguous minority, it was due to never having had a true charismatic leader.

In the *folie à famille*, the "inducing" figure often displays that same personal appeal and the same capacity to persuade.

> Folie à six. The case of the Austrian hairdresser
>
> His suspicion of the neighbors grew, fearing that they might try to manipulate his family with technical devices. When he verified that his electricity bill had increased and one day a cable briefly hung in front of his window, he felt this was confirmed. In the winter of 1984-1985 the delusion had swallowed the rest of the family. Mrs. A's husband and her two children had symptoms similar to hers during the night and tiredness in the morning. They asked a sister-in-law and a nephew to sleep in the apartment and they too presented ambiguous physical complaints.
>
> [...] Mrs. A. presented herself as an attractive woman who looked younger than her age. She wore a sporty outfit that was well put-together and gave the impression of being a kind and charming person. She recounted her story in a convincing and vigorous manner, captivating the attention of her interlocutor. Furthermore, she produced a clear feeling of countertransference: this woman cannot be so ill (7).

The charisma of the PP is selective, so that the very man who strikes his admirers as fascinating and convincing seems to others simpleminded, affected, self-serving, or simply unpleasant. This contrast is quite common in the universe of cult groups and something similar happens with the totalitarian leaders of the PS, who also provoke… '*extreme reactions*".

The PP demonstrates his charisma through his success in attracting, convincing, and achieving enthusiastic allegiances. But, as if that were not enough, one must bear in mind that he attracts followers to causes that tend to require a high degree of personal involvement

from the neophyte and that, often, entail a radical break with prior beliefs — those beliefs that seemed so solidly established.

The charismatic PP does not seek simple affiliations, nor mere allegiances; he seeks instead *conversions*. In the PP's proselytism, the emotional impact always predominates over logical argumentation.

> Nazism
>
> Hess was also politically active during his student days. When he happened to hear Hitler speak he was so impressed that he joined the recently established National Socialist Workers' Party (32).

> Nazism
>
> Speer wrote: At that moment I did not choose the party but the man whose personality had made such a profound impression on me at our first meeting, a feeling I have never lost. His powers of persuasion, the strange magic of his voice, indisputably pleasant, the singularity of his somewhat banal behavior, and the simplified and seductive way of handling our complicated problems — all of this confused and excited me. I knew almost nothing of his political program. He had deeply affected me before I could even begin to understand him (32).

This emotional reaction of the proselyte or neophyte toward the leader usually includes a strong component of euphoric exaltation.

> Maoism
>
> While listening to Mao's voice announcing that 'the Chinese people have risen', she reproached herself for having hesitated. Her sufferings were trivial compared to the grand cause of China's salvation. Feeling deeply proud and swelling with nationalist enthusiasm, she swore to herself never to stray from the revolution (17).

Once the fanatical leader has seduced, impacted, moved, and enthused his followers, he finds it easy to convince them of anything.

> Sokagakkai
>
> The lectures renewed and uplifted their audience; they were imbued with the notion that True Buddhism and daily life are one and the same thing. Every had an innate and unpremeditated

> capacity to reach directly into the hearts of those who listened to him, and to explain the most complex Buddhist concepts in a completely clear and intelligible way. In this manner, he opened to the truth their eyes, until then blind (14).

Who are those who become successful PL? In his research on the *cargo*, Burton-Bradley reached the following conclusion.

> Crisis cults. The Melanesian cargo (20th century)
> There are three main types of cult [cargo] leaders: the prophet, the messiah, and the entrepreneur. The prophet initiates the cult through a hallucination, the messiah believes he has the capacity to bring about the cargo millennium, and the entrepreneur dedicates himself to channeling the cult in a realistic direction, but rarely succeeds (4).

We are particularly interested in the first two profiles which, in reality, have a considerably more universal validity: fanatical activists and post-revelation prophets.

Tenacious Fanatics

> Paranoia
> Within the patient there is a desire for something great and elevated… (18).

The paranoid's delusions of grandeur take shape in a wide variety of objectives.

> Paranoid assassins. John Wilkes Booth
> When he was 22 years old, Booth saw Lincoln for the first time and immediately took a dislike to the President's appearance, manners, and beliefs. When he was only 24 years old his artistic career began to decline, due to chronic laryngitis, and around that time, two years before the assassination, he declared to his friends, 'What a glorious opportunity, for a man, to immortalize himself by killing Abraham Lincoln!' At 25, his prospects as an actor were gradually declining, and he began to present a series of somatic complaints and to speak with uncontrollable hatred. He was convinced that Lincoln was planning to make himself monarch of the United States.
> On Good Friday of 1865, he shot Lincoln in the head with a Derringer pistol while the President was attending a theatrical performance. Before entering Ford's Theatre he said:

> 'When I leave the hall [...] I will be the most famous man in America'. Booth was then 26 years old (30).

That "something great," at times, is a vocation for leadership that dates back to the future LP's childhood.

> Irish nationalism
> [O'Connell's] childhood dream was to become the Washington of his country. Later he saw Napoleon as a friend of Ireland. Still later, he identified with Simón Bolívar, another 'Liberator,' and proudly sent his 14-year-old son Morgan with the purpose of joining the Irish Legion fighting for freedom against Spain (16).

Or it develops later.

> TFP
> When I was still very young,
> I considered in ecstasy
> the ruins of Christendom.
> To them I gave my heart.
> I turned my back on my future;
> and made of that past
> filled with blessings,
> my future to come (5).

> Maoist Leninism
> [...] [Mao] admires Napoleon, the soldier more than Robespierre the revolutionary.He confesses that he wants to be the Chinese George Washington (22).

However, the desire for fame, recognition or glory is not the only thing that drives him. There is something more than greatness.

> Paranoia
> Within the patient there is a desire for something great and elevated… (18).

The messianic leader emerges, gradually, from a subject who had previously already devoted his life to the highest ideals, the most *elevated*. The portrait of the fanatic corresponds to

a hyperactive, self-taught person, always in search of others like himself and aligned with his ideas, more concerned with society than with himself...

> Maoist Leninism
>
> He is an indefatigable reader. After returning from fieldwork he immerses himself in reading the Chinese classics. He rages against the defeats that China has suffered at the hands of Japan and the European powers [...] All these ideas and some of the solutions he will ruminate over, having abandoned the Confucian tradition of filial piety, during his years of study at the School of Changsha, the capital of Hunan province. It is a land of 'rebels and bandits'. Mao has seen the decapitated bodies of peasants hanging from poles at the entrance to the city. 'The local bureaucrats —he says— will savagely repress any popular uprising,' he notes in his notebook: 'Whoever wins the favor of the peasants will conquer China.' He will cut off his queue as a sign of protest against the decadent Manchu dynasty. He reads Kant, Spinoza, Paulsen, Marx and Engels, Tolstoy, Kropotkin, Bakunin. He has gone to live in Beijing. He led a miserable life, sleeping in a small room with seven other students (22).

And it is in the struggle, alongside his fellow believers, that the certainty takes shape that *he* has a very special destiny...

> TFP
>
> It is necessary to confront the nascent danger. Studies and long conversations with the other fellow fighters are forming in Plinio Corrêa de Oliveira the conviction that, faced with the storm threatening the Church, someone must assume the tragic role of lightning rod (5).

Illumination

Regarding the prophets post-revelation, it must be noted that the latter does not always occur in the form of a hallucination. The starting point of messianic conviction can be a unique, extraordinary and unusual experience: illumination.

> Reformers and regicides
>
> With their brain prepared to receive affective judgments without subjecting them to rational criticism, regicides have one day the luminous revelation of the path they must follow, of the gesture they must perform, to bring happiness to humanity, to make equity reign (6).

A *luminous revelation* gives rise to the leadership of a good number of cult leaders.

> Sokagakkai
>
> It is said that as a result of these revelations in prison, an 'extremely strange sensation' shook Toda, 'and a world that I had never been able to see before was revealed before me'. His body trembling with ecstatic happiness, Toda rose in his cell and cried out to 'all the Buddhas, all the Bodhisattvas, and all the common men of the world' that he had found, at the age of forty-five, 'the true meaning of life'.

This episode marks the true beginning of the New Soka Gakkai" (23).

The spectacular experience of illumination confers *ipso facto* the conviction of being, not merely a good leader, but *the* leader.

> Sokagakkai
>
> As he used to say to himself, what allowed him –and him alone– to unlock the force of life universal, embodied in Nam-myoho-renge-kyo and latent in all people was the mystical experience he had lived through in prison (14).

And, being already the leader, his successive illuminations confirm to him that he must continue to be so.

> Sokagakkai
>
> He knew that he was living another mysterious state of revelation like the one he had felt in prison during the Second World War. His existence had merged with that greater life of the entire universe. He perceived eternity in the instant; and as he trembled before the intense joy of understanding the radiant glory of living, he silently invoked the daimoku within himself in gratitude.
>
> Then, the ecstasy passed. Toda looked around, to see only the same grey streets as always, the brownish houses, and the sombre pedestrians. Even so, the radiance of his mystical experience remained in his heart. His spirit had freed itself from all its chains. He knew that the Dai-Gohonzon protected him, that he could not exist outside the Dai-Gohonzon, and that the path he had chosen to follow as leader of the Soka Gakkai in its mission to bring the truth to humanity was righteous and inevitable (14).

Apparitions

Many LPs hear the voice of God or of other *superior beings* (never inferior ones or simply different ones).

> Sectarian groups. Shiloh
> The men of Shiloh offered their loyalty to someone to whom God spoke directly… (9).

On other occasions the *superior being* also allows itself to be seen, in dreams or in states of trance.

> Mystical delusion. Clinical case
> Christ is aware of her fervor and comes to visit her in her dreams, in the form of a handsome young man whose hand blesses her; always in dreams, he has instructed her to build for him a temple supported by thirteen columns of white marble, each one corresponding to an apostle and the thirteenth to Judas (6).

Often one of these visions or auditions constitutes the transcendental event from which the LP begins his career as a preacher.

> Crisis cults. Hau-hau (19th century)
> In 1862, Te Ua announced that he had had a vision and that the Angel Gabriel had appeared to him; he declared that he was going to kill his own son in order to obtain the salvation of his people, who had become 'negligent and were prey to desolation and doubt.' However, it appears that upon attempting to carry out this sacrifice, he managed nothing more than to break the boy's legs (3).

> Cargo cults
> The Lyeime movement was started by a middle-aged man from the Kamani clan [composed of about 200 natives]. People say that L. dreamed of the ghost of his deceased father Ain [...] The ghost of Ain is said to have revealed to him how, in life, he had found an ancestral Tree Kangaroo in a forest. In that encounter, a new doctrine and vision of life was revealed to him. The time was now ripe to make everyone aware of it. L. first instructed his brothers, then gathered the Kamani clan. Such were his newfound power and authority that L. convinced the people that what he said was true [...] He told the Kamani that they had to sacrifice all their pigs to the Sun [...] this was an extraordinary request, which entailed the destruction of

> most of the wealth the community possessed. But according to my informants they did so and not one of them held back. They killed all the pigs (27).

Angels and higher beings do not appear solely to illiterate men from primitive peoples. They also do so in the industrialized and Western world.

> Cult groups. *Community Chapel*
> Barnett claims that his 'movement of God' had its origins in a series of experiences he had, including an encounter with a 'dancing angel'. His 'revelation teaching' derived in part from a divine vision in which God told him that He would give him the truth that He had never before given to any man. 'God made me know that no man had entered that higher realm than what I saw. He let me experience things that no man has ever seen. I connected with God; I lived the Revelation, I was one with Jesus Christ (9).

> Sokagakkai
> While I was in prison, during the war, I read the Lotus Sutra almost without rest. And on one occasion, I even saw myself, a follower of Nichiren Daishonin, attending the great assembly at which the Lotus Sutra was preached for the first time. It is strange how sometimes a man can visualize an event from the remote past (14).

We can contrast the apparitions, in which the future leader receives a visit, with the journeys in which it is he himself who makes the visit to the beyond. It is in that realm of the afterlife that he receives the charge to transform himself into a preacher and leader.

> Crisis cults. Lauliwasikaw (19th century)
> It is said that Lauliwasikaw [...] was one day lighting his pipe in his hut when he fell backwards, apparently dead. His friends gathered for the funeral, as was customary, when he emerged from his trance or his bout of alcoholism saying that he had been led by two young men to the boundary of the spirit land and had been allowed to look inside. There he had received a new revelation from the Master of Life... (20).

> Crisis cults. Handsome Lake (18th century)
> In June of 1799, Handsome Lake had a vision or a dream. Three angels descended from heaven to explain to him that his illness was due to his excesses with drink. All the Seneca drank too much alcohol and practiced witchcraft, and their current situation was due to these

two causes. The angels led him to a tower that overlooked heaven and hell and informed him that the Good Spirit commanded him to teach the Seneca the return to the straight path. He came out of the trance at the very moment his family was preparing to bury him. Fortunately, a Quaker preacher from the surrounding area wrote an English version of his revelations, and his brother Cornplanter gathered people around him to listen to his words. After several other visions, Handsome Lake felt better, left his bed, and began his career as a preacher (20).

Crisis cults. The *shakers* of Puget Sound (19th century)

The Prophet Dance had another continuation. John Slocum was the founder of the *shakers* or 'trembling ones' [...] One morning in 1882, when he was about forty years old, he 'died' or fell into a trance that lasted until nightfall. His father set off toward Olympia to fetch a coffin; a grave had already been dug as well (it is the custom in the region to hasten burials). But, when he awoke, he said he had been in heaven. Some angels had blocked his way because of the sins he had committed on earth. They had made him choose between hell or returning to earth to teach people how to gain entry into heaven, and he had chosen the latter option (20).

Once surrounded by his followers, revelations to the LP continue to occur. The leader is nothing but an intermediary, or one more link in a chain of command. The one who really makes the decisions and establishes the dogmas, the one who sits at the apex of the pyramid, is an invisible being (or several). But only the leader has access to him.

Sectarian groups. *No-Name Fellowship*

Over time, as Kleber received more and more 'revelations,' life became progressively more rigid and difficult [...] a broad spectrum of behaviors that included dress, diet, work habits, personal style and manners, prayer, Bible study, fasting, entertainment, employment, and whether or not to have children (9).

Exactly the same occurs in *folie à deux* although we are no longer speaking of the LP but of the "delusional inducer."

Folie à deux. Marie M. and husband

For two years they continued to suffer financial setbacks. She believed that the neighbors were insulting her and returned the attacks with interest. She persuaded her husband that their misfortunes were the result of a plot that had been laid against her. In 1878 she told her husband that she had heard the voice of an angel announcing to her that God had called her

to high destinies, for which she would have to prepare herself through suffering, and that she would have to bear with patience all the misfortunes that He would send her. Her behavior changed, she became gentle and resigned, and left the neighbors in peace. In early 1880, the angel, whose voice she had heard for two years, warned her that a great trial awaited her. 'Your mother's soul suffers; not only does she need your prayers, but an expiation must also take place. God wants you to act as if you were mad so that they will confine you in the Saint Pierre Asylum. When the moment comes, he will warn you.' In early June she was warned in a dream that the moment had come, and she felt compelled by a superior force to commit eccentric acts [...] She was very reserved, but showed herself to be arrogant toward the asylum officials, whom she treated as mere executors of her designs [...] Marie M. informed the superintendent that the angel had set July 1st as the date of her release, and that she had asked her husband to come and fetch her. The man appeared on the appointed day and, upon the doctor's refusal to let her leave, a violent outburst of rage and threats ensued (15).

Revelations also provide important premonitions. By knowing the future, the leader can make the most convenient decisions for his flock.

Sectarian groups. Reverend Jones's People's Temple

1965. Jones claims to have had a vision of the nuclear holocaust that was to occur on July 15, 1967. Citing an article from the magazine *Esquire*, Jones claims that Northern California will be spared from the explosion of the bombs and from destruction by nuclear war (19).

Previous personality and rupture

The experience of revelation, especially the first, is extraordinarily intense and marks a clear before and after.

Sokagakkai

If one seeks the root of the basic personality characteristics of Toda, one must inevitably highlight the sublime, solemn moment of revelation he experienced in prison during the Second War World. He often spoke of that mystical moment, the result of his deep reading of the Lotus Sutra. From that point on, the rest of his life changed completely (14).

Before, Toda had been an unstable subject with no fixed direction in a life that had dealt him hard blows.

> Sokagakkai
> Toda Josei (1900-1958) was a different kind of man. Like Makiguchi, he came to Tokyo from Hokkaido. In Tokyo he began a career as a teacher during which he met Makiguchi and was so impressed that he virtually became his disciple. But he abandoned it in 1923 to make his own way, successively selling insurance, running a school, writing, printing and publishing. Prosperity eluded him, and in 1924 his son died, followed in 1926 by his wife. He tried Christianity without success, and in 1928 he joined the Nichiren Shoshu alongside his mentor (34).

But, from his enlightenment onwards…

> Sokagakkai
> When he was enlightened with respect to the great truth of Nam-myoho-renge-kyo, Toda's eyes were freed from clouds. The sufferings and difficulties of the first half of his life were left behind. With absolute lucidity, he glimpsed the radiant future and his own immense mission: kosen-rufu, the universal propagation of faith in True Buddhism and the salvation of all humanity (14).

(…) he experiences a profound change of personality: self-assured, he acquires a charisma —which he previously lacked— that leads him to be exalted and gradually transformed by his followers into an extraordinary man, a unique being, a demigod, a god, or God himself.

> Sokagakkai
> What set Toda apart from ordinary men was his extraordinary creativity. It was true that he could be defined within a great number of activities: educator, entrepreneur, believer, leader of the people, but his creative originality was such that it caused him to transcend all categories. Many people possess ability, and well-defined character traits. But Toda was a truly singular individual. And most singular of all was his capacity to give his creativity practical application in great works (14).

The experience of revelation occasionally affects apparently normal individuals.

> Crisis cults. The Melanesian cargo (20th century)

> Apparently there was nothing unusual about him before his revelation of the new teaching. He was in good health and had received some wounds in combat but no cranial trauma. He had done in his life the things that were expected of men.
> [...] But L. changed dramatically at the moment he announced his vision. He seemed larger and stronger than before and an aura of invincibility surrounded him (27).

But it is not always so. More often than not, the leaders of crisis cults and sectarian movements have conflicted or unstable prior lives and personalities, have suffered personal tragedies and/or have been alcoholics or drug users... In these cases the change is even more unexpected.

> Crisis cults. Lauliwasikaw (19th century)
> In 1805, a certain Lauliwasikaw (a name derived from the shaman's sacred rattle), began his famous career as 'prophet of the Shawnee'. It is said that Lauliwasikau, who had distinguished himself until then only by his stupidity and his drunkenness... (20).

> Crisis cults. The *shakers* of Puget Sound (19th century)
> Born around 1838, Slocum was a Squaxin Indian, a small Salish group that lived on Little Skookum Bay, in the southwest of Puget Sound. In his youth he had frequented the Protestant mission of the Skokomish; he was a man who was not distinguished by anything, save for a somewhat pronounced fondness for alcohol and horseracing (20).

> Sectarian groups. The Davidians
> The natural son of a carpenter, he did not meet his father until he was 17 years old, after searching through the Houston phone book looking for men with the surname Howell, the name he carried until he decided to change it in 1990, claiming that David Koresh rhymed better with an intended career in show business (26).

> Messianic movements. Mother Ann Lee (18th century)
> In 1758, a young woman named Ann Lee joined the [shaker] movement. She was twenty-two years old and came from an illiterate and wretched family. Married for six years, she already had five children, all of whom would die at an early age. In 1770 she was imprisoned because of her active shaker militancy. During her time in prison, she had a decisive revelation… (2).

A revelation that led her to transform herself into the leader of an ascetic and communist community that considered her the second incarnation of Christ, and whose existence would continue for nearly two centuries, well into the twentieth century.

Handsome Lake, brother of the Seneca leader Cornplanter, shared the despair of his people. Being a warrior people, they had been defeated by the Americans and abandoned by thepeoples they had once subjugated. The remaining Seneca despised them for their defeatism in the face of the Americans and the signing of humiliating treaties. They lacked land to cultivate and animals to hunt, and hunger gripped them. In these circumstances, accusations of witchcraft proliferated, families fell apart, and men gave themselvesover to alcohol consumption. Handsome Lake, for his part, added to all of this his own personal tragedy.

> Crisis cults. Handsome Lake (18th century)
> Cornplanter had an older brother, Handsome Lake, who was then around fifty years old. Handsome Lake had fought against the Americans during the War of Independence and was at that time one of the fifty-nine chiefs of the Grand Council of the [Iroquois] League. Around 1799, alcoholism had reduced him to a dying man, bedridden, neurasthenic from the death of his wife, his favorite son, and the niece he cherished most, Cornplanter's daughter, and from the abandonment of another of his sons. Fearing he would die himself from illness or witchcraft, he would intone, when drunk, the old sacred songs, the *ohgiwe*, which are only sung for the dead. When sober, he felt guilty of a sin, which only added despair to his life as a drunkard. He was a broken man (20).

There are, then, two types of LP: the idealist, tireless activist, filled with yearnings for greatness, who gradually convinces himself of his messianic destiny, and the individual with no particular restlessness or messianic vocation who, starting from an unexpected experience of revelation (coming from a *higher being*) undergoes a sudden transformation that fills him with enthusiasm, conviction, and charisma, and which frequently causes him to overcome a past of instability and personal failures. Though the LP of the first group, the messianic ones, also frequently emerge from a conflicted or traumatic past.

> Maoist Leninism
> In 1905, the wife of Mao Kuo-fan, unable to bear her husband's cruelties, committed suicide in Shaoshan, in the pond of the estate where they lived, near Chang Sha. One of her sons, the

young Mao Zedong, twelve years old, spent many hours there with his eyes lost in the murky waters. Some time later he attempted to take his own life in the same pond.
[...] The grandfather was known throughout the province by the name of Ping-Ying, meaning 'The Squeezer.' He married the widow of one of the murdered landowners, and his second son was named Mao Kuo-fan. This new Mao improved upon his father's methods and expanded the estate. He had several sons, as rough and violent as he was.
But in 1893 a child was born, who immediately surprised those around him with his intelligence and sensitivity. This enraged his father, and young Zedong became the favored target of his frequent fits of anger, with no refuge other than the warmth of a silent and resigned mother. His grandfather, intrigued by the boy's intelligence, began paying for his first schooling. But he died soon, and Mao Zedong was forced by his father to work in the harshest rural trades. At twelve, Mao fled the family home and later sided with a peasant revolt that ended in the looting of his father's warehouses. Following his wife's death and the attempted suicide of the boy, who had been forcibly brought back home, Mao Kuo-fan relented and sent him to study in Chang Sha.Mao Zedong's entire childhood had been spent between longings for parricide and wishes to kill himself like his mother (1).

Fascism

Benito Mussoliniwas pathologically aggressive, suspicious, and possessed of feelings of grandiosity from childhood onward, right up until his death in 1945. Like his ally Adolf Hitler, Mussoliniwas unable to adapt to a school environment and did not complete his educationin this regard not even to a secondary level.By the age of 20 he had already been imprisoned on several occasions for vagrancy and for advocating anarchy, and, more significantly, his violent character had driven him to stab three people in the course of as many fits of rage or jealousy (29).

Revelation in the adept

As happens with the LP, the conversion or conviction of the adept also bears a close relationship with experiences that have nothing to do with argumentation and logic.

It is situated closer to *illumination*, an experience at times described with igneous metaphors.

> Nazism
>
> ...From all sides could be heard the tones of Prussian military marches. Then I saw something unknown to me: the women and girls marching in the dark Hitlerian uniform... A flame had been kindled within my heart and continued burning steadily, there was no room for any other thought within me..." (Gudrum Streiter, cited in 12).

> Leninism. Shining Path
>
> Every Shining Path member proclaimed carrying their life at their fingertips, ready to surrender it to Gonzalo, seized in many cases by visions of fire and transcendent devotion... (11).

Just as the revelation experience of the LP names him and confirms him in his messianic mission, those same experiences in the followers also reaffirm the leader in his position, either because the *superior being* that appears to the followers is the leader himself, …

> Cult groups. Moonies
>
> The type of experience described by a member with no prior history or subsequent history of psychiatric disorder was not uncommon. After a period of prayer at home following a seminar, he saw the face of Rev. Mr. Moon in front of him and heard him speaking to him directly, revealing his mission, 'as real as we are talking now (10).

(…) or because strange signs become visible around him…

> Domestic tyranny. Rachel's case
>
> One night during dinner, I looked at Fred and saw a bright light, like a halo, around his head. We were talking about extrasensory perceptions, past lives and the paranormal powers that some people possess. I felt swept away and captivated by his every word. I cannot remember exactly everything we talked about, but our conversation began to take on a new meaning. He was no longer the client who had become my boyfriend. I felt honored and truly fortunate to be the object of his attention, his respect and his affection. His appearance seemed to change when his features took on a special glow and appeal, a circumstance that amazed me not to have noticed before (30).

(…) or else because it is the leader, and only the leader, who proves capable of provoking ecstatic or illuminating experiences in the follower.

Cult groups. Lubavitch

He looked at me and my life changed', says Ron Garonce, a photographer from Montreal. He has come to attend a conference that the Lubavitch often hold for less observant Jews. 'His gaze met mine for an instant. How could I describe it? You know what happens in Star Trek when they teleport people? That's what it was like for me. He gripped me from my feet to my eyes and transported me to a more authentic level of Judaism (28).

Maoist Leninism

But Mao had a real magnetism. He did not speak standard Mandarin, but the Hunanese dialect he used is very easy to understand for Mandarin Chinese speakers, and its rhythm and tonality are pleasant to the ear. Mao's voice was soft, almost harmonious, and his manner of speaking strongly drew one's attention. 'The Chinese people have stood up!', he proclaimed, and the crowd began to applaud with all their might, shouting over and over: 'Long live the People's Republic of China!' and 'Long live the Chinese Communist Party!'. I felt such great joy that it seemed my heart might burst at any moment, and I began to cry. I was so proud of China, so full of hope, so happy that the suffering, exploitation and aggression of foreigners had come to an end forever (8).

Even when the CL addresses large crowds, his deluded followers take it personally. Each one of them feels that they are the direct recipients of his words. It is a kind of self-referential distortion of reality, a delusional perception, which establishes a magical connection between the leader and the led.

Nazism

During recent years I have always had the same experience; when I have heard this voice... I have always felt irresistibly drawn to it. It spoke to me, to the unknown one, to one among 66 million. It was about me: my transformation, my purification, my conversion into a German. And this voice always found the secret path that truly leads to the very depths, it found the bolts behind which the last resistance was locked away, it blew open the most secret door, melted with the fire of its heart all doubts, silenced the 'inner swine' and awakened 'the hero'" (Wolfgang Brügge, cited in 36).

This distortion of reality reaches the degree of genuine delusional conviction in some sectarian groups, whose adepts feel and believe themselves to be observed, watched, and

even encouraged by their leader, all of this without a single word being exchanged. The all-seeing eye of the cult leader protects and comforts the adept, while at the same time intimidating and dissuading them from any insubordination.

To close this section, it must be highlighted that in the adept's conversion experience, emotion, conviction, and subordination merge into a single reality, intensely lived.

> Nazism
>
> ...I was thus able to continue. Half an hour later, the interruptions and booing were drowned out by salvos of applause, and finally, when I had explained the twenty-five points I had set out toexpound,a hall overflowingwith people came together in a new conviction, a new faith, a new will. A fire had been kindled, from whose glow would emerge the sword destined to restore the freedom of the Germanic Siegfried and the life of Germanization (13).

> French Imperialism
>
> There is no reason to doubt the accounts of the time that speak of the Emperor's capacity to inspire among his soldiersan enthusiasm and a loyalty without limits, whether at the camp of Boulogne or on the battlefield (35).

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