Clan and Folk

by Walther Groß, 1943

A political revolution proves its spiritual and ideological character by its ability to transform traditional ideas and concepts of folkish life and to fill them with new content almost unnoticed. National Socialism has been able to do this in many areas over the last two decades. But one of the most striking examples of the transforming and formative power of its new spirit is the change that the content of the word “folk” has undergone in the feelings and consciousness of Germans in our days.

Not too long ago, a fragmented and atomized Liberal epoch was so alienated from the idea of a folkish community that it did not even have a valid word for it. For up to the threshold of the world war of 1914, the word “folk!” was misused as a designation for a splinter of the whole, for a single social stratum in its struggle against the other. Terms like “freedom of the folk”, “rights of the folk”, the founding of folk’s papers and folk’s homes are an eloquent expression of the shocking fact that neither the proletarian nor the bourgeois side had any understanding of the true nature of the folk at that time. And when Bismarck, forger of the Reich, in the midst of the petty parliamentary bickering of the parties, hurled in bright indignation at his opponents the historic words: “Folk! We all belong to the folk, I belong to the folk too!”, even the great chancellor’s political entourage took this remark as half a joke and responded with the benevolent mockery of witty caricatures-proof of how far ahead the great chancellor was of the political sentiments of his time. For it was only in the steel storms of the World War, only on the battlefields of the years 1914-1918, that the German soldier experienced the greatness and unconditionality of the community, for which the word “folk”, which had been misused for so long, was now regained with elementary self-evidence. And what had then been the experience and possession of one part of the nation, the soldier at the front, and initially only for the exceptional historical period of the greatest of the wars to date, was lifted into the consciousness of all Germans after the collapse of National Socialism and made it an imperishable possession also for times of peace and historical everyday life. Since then, “folk” has been the word for the highest and ultimate community, which connects our own small fate with that of the millions beside us and gives it historical greatness in fortune or misfortune, in victory or defeat.

At the same time, however, the spirit of the new age carried out another transformation of the time-honoured word. It broke through the traditional boundaries that purely state thinking had set for its validity. It extended it beyond the decomposed space of the systemic realm and included the millions and millions who live in foreign states and foreign countries, although they are of our blood and therefore members of the German folk. In the midst of the deep decline of our history, National Socialism presents before our eyes, in the proud word “folk”, the enormous image of a hundred million Germans on this side and on the other side of the borders, who are an indissoluble unity through common blood and common language and common destiny.

And even this is not enough. Once again, the spiritual revolution of our time expands the boundaries of the concept of the folk and now boldly and irresistibly reaches beyond our own time. Before the hundred million Germans of today, their parents lived, their grandparents, their ancestors, decade after decade, century after century back into the most distant, unknown past. And after us will live our children, our grandchildren, generation after generation through the centuries into a distant, unknown future. They all belong together, they all together make up the great river of blood in which every generation, including ours, is only like a wave that rises and reflects the light of day for a moment to sink and make way for the next. But the stream itself flows undisturbed towards its distant goal. And before this mighty image of the highest community, the age finds in quiet shuddering the profound phrase of the “eternal folk of the Germans”.

So enormous has been the transformation and so profound the enrichment of the meaning of the word “folk” in our days. But it is necessary that we also give an account of the consequences that this spiritual development has for our ideas of the structure and the basic elements of the folk. As long as the folk was understood to be at best the community of those living side by side in one time, it could well be thought of as the sum of the individuals, as a summary of the individuals. But the eternal folk cannot be won in this way. For the individual human being is transient. He may have an effect on the future through his work, but as a living being, he is denied duration and participation in future times. His physical existence is exhausted between birth and grave. Only in the circle of the family and the clan does man gain a share in the eternity of his folk: as the child of his parents and ancestors, as the father or mother of future generations. And so, according to its structure, the folk today stands transformed before our inner gaze. Whereas the liberal era preferred to draw superficial comparisons between folks and organisms composed of cells, as the folk are supposedly composed of single individuals, today the family appears to us as the smallest unit, as the germ cell and ultimate building block of the folk. In it are resolved the forces of procreation and birth, of rearing, of growth and again of new birth, which only give the folk the character of the lasting and thus, insofar as this exists on earth, of the eternal. Family and clan, as the last and smallest unit of the greatest and highest concept of our world view, thus acquire a new, consecrated meaning that has nothing to do with the narrow, petty-bourgeois ideas of a sunken, plush sofa epoch, but arises from the great vision of the immediate, living connection between the most distant epochs of our history. In the family we see the end point of all lineages that reach from the past to the present and convey to us the tremendous heritage of historical experience, in it at the same time the countless sources from which the ever- renewed life flows towards future historical greatness.

So, it is no wonder that the time of the imperfect concept of the folk brought with it the decay of the nations and also the decay of the families. Since the community was seen to be composed of individuals, the evil word of the family as a private matter was coined in dangerous arrogance. The terrible consequences of this misconception are well known. There was no room for family and kin in those days. Child poverty and childlessness became widespread. The decline in the birth rate also ate away at the existence of our folk. Misjudged in its historical significance, promoted by corrosive propaganda, virtually untouched by feeble resistance from bourgeois circles, fertility-death made its entry into town and country, and the life curve of the nation finally plunged inexorably into dizzying depths in the age of the system. Only National Socialism brought change here. From the moment it came to power, the situation improved from year to year. With full awareness of the historical significance of the problem, the Party and the state used their means to restore and increase the will to family and child and to secure the preconditions for their life, which had been sacrilegiously destroyed yesterday. Not some unworldly so-called morality of yesterday, but only the mighty force of the German Revolution has brought about the miracle of the increase in the birth rate since 1933, and it alone can do it because it alone has the spiritual and ideological prerequisites which are indispensable for this. One of the greatest proofs of the inner strength of this new age is that the newly awakened sense of family and the folk’s joy in having children have at first been only imperceptibly disturbed by the severe test of this war. The first two years of the tremendous struggle of the present time have, quite in contrast to the last war and quite contrary to the effects among our enemies, brought only a slight decline in births in Germany-a proud testimony to the strength and confidence of the renewed nation.

Nevertheless, the war also confronts German population policy with new tasks and difficulties. With longer duration, a stronger decline in births is of course inevitable. At the same time, however, the demand for folk of one’s own blood and best performance is growing. The gaps which even the victorious war tears in the ranks of the folk must be filled; the newly won territories need enormous numbers of people in order to fulfil their future task for the Reich; the world power Germany, which will stand at the end of the victorious struggle, needs a thousand more heads and hands in all spheres of life than the country which is pressed into narrow limits. than the narrowly confined state of the past: the demands which the generations of today and in the future will make on the human power and the racial value of our folk. If we measure the successes of our population policy against this mandate of history rather than against some mathematical figure, then, with all justifiable pride in what has been achieved, the magnitude of what still remains to be done becomes clear, and it becomes understandable that our population policy is really only at the beginning, is really only in its infancy. If we are really serious about the idea that a nation does not consist of individuals, but of families and clans, which only fulfil their final task in a large group of healthy children of the best blood, then this idea also means a radical revolution in countless areas of the economic and practical order of state and social life, the full extent of which obviously only a few people today see clearly before their eyes. Here, during the war and even more so after the victory, a rethinking will be demanded in countless areas, before which many a mind caught up in the past and tradition may fear, but which the compelling force of our new idea and the inexorable demand of history will demand and enforce. Alongside the practical, legal and economic reorganization in the sense of population policy, however, there is the spiritual development, which leads to a new ideal and type formation, which is also not yet complete, because for too long foreign and anti-life ideas have dominated our folk and determined their tradition. All too often in the past, there has been tension between the bourgeois idea of the family and the shining examples of powerful professions and outstanding personalities. All too easily, the world of the family has smacked of the narrow and dull, of the private in the worst sense of the word, lacking the broad view of active life and even more so the far-reaching spirit of political boldness. The cosy self-sufficiency of a Biedermeier ideal, to which the world is exhausted within the confines of four walls, seemed to belong inevitably to the idea of the family, from which therefore the man of action and the great work, the man and finally also the woman, fled with the longing for the breadth of the spirit and the share in the great life of history. This is how it came about that bachelorhood and child poverty were most widespread in precisely those places where, for the sake of above-average achievement and the most valuable assets, we had to feel the strongest desire for abundance of children. After all, the above average procreation of the best of the folk is the only way to the regeneration and the real development of a nation. For in this field, too, a change of knowledge and attitude has taken place. The age-old dream of humanity of a better and higher life in future times was to be realized for centuries, even millennia, through the higher education and development of the individual, the individual who again has been the sole focus of attention. Education and upbringing, sometimes of the mind, sometimes of the body, in the most favourable case both together, have appeared to countless generations of striving and thoughtful people as a means of achieving that high goal of increased folkdom and humanity. But it is only in our days that we have become fully aware that education and training are irrevocably linked to the dispositions that can be educated and trained, that not school systems but only the selection of the best, that not education but only breeding and breeding across the generations can improve the dispositions of a folk. There is no other way to this goal. And whoever seriously strives towards this goal will see the decisive task in the formation and shaping of families and clans.

That is why the contrast between the formation of types and the formation of ideals, of which we have just spoken, was so infinitely disastrous, and that is why the change that is taking place here today is of such profound significance. For it is true that ours is more strongly marked than earlier times by the model of the strong, the bold, the heroic man who sees the wide world as his field, which he cultivates, in war and peace, with plough, sword or thought. But with this ideal of the far-reaching human being, living in the distance of time and the vastness of space, we immediately associate the demand for family and children, not as a contradictory image, but as the completion and fulfilment of a truly fully lived life. Only both, the individual achievement and deed and the supra-personal one of family formation and child rearing, together make up the full commitment of man to his folk, which we demand of everyone and which only fulfils existence. Only the two together do justice to the nature of the human being, to be at the same time an independent individual and a link in the chain of generations, which must not break. For what we possess in powers and abilities we owe to the loyalty of those who gave us the fiefdom; a span of time is their inheritance and entrusted to us to work and act; like our parents and forefathers, however, we must pass it on to our children and grandchildren so that it outlasts us as it once did before us.

Today we educate our folk to such a view and attitude, and before the greatness of this task the contrasts of yesterday sink. To the figure of the fighter, the hero, the victor, the servant in the great work belongs the domestic image of his family and clan; and these no longer exclude for us the great thoughts and feelings that move the world and shape history. Just as the folk cannot be without their families, so today the small unit of the German family lives consciously in the whole community of the folk, and what was often contradictory yesterday finally rings together in one full chord. But here, as we speak of the ideal of education and attitude of our time, a word must not be omitted about the limits of its realization. The great models which the new age sets up should awaken the longing, spur the forces, designate the goal towards which the nation must strive. But they must not, abused by small and narrow folks, become the oppressive norm, the unjust measure of each individual destiny. The nature and disposition of the folk of a nation are infinitely varied, as are their earthly course and their fate. Not everyone has the same opportunities in fiefdom, not everyone the same strength, and the lots of fortune and misfortune, of fulfilment and renunciation are allotted to them differently. There is always an unfilled space between the ideal and reality, and what we make out to be the rule must also have its exceptions. Our generation in particular has experienced this hard in this area, when the world war took 2 million men from us and thus in countless cases the possibility of marriage for our girls. And even outside the exceptional times of war, there will always be a small number of people for whom inner or outer reasons prevent them from fulfilling what we demand as the norm, and what is often the deepest longing of their hearts, even for those who renounce it. A strong and healthy folk can tolerate these exceptions. Only the zealot will, short-sightedly and blindly against all reason, make his principle the final judge of life, which at times takes special paths for people and folks. National Socialism is spiritually great enough to understand and appreciate the exception, its goal and ideal too strong and too compelling not to allow the exceptional time its own law, the special human being his other form of life. It is not a question of each individual member of the nation realizing at all costs and without exception what the idea of family and kinship demands of the whole, but that it should determine the spirit and the attitude of the folk as a whole and practically ensure their eternal life. The idea and the ideal are exclusive and unconditional and tolerate no compromise. Their application to individual destiny may then, in our case, be confidently full of generosity. No one will see in this a feeble retreat when he considers that in a short time, we have so thoroughly displaced an ideal that was hostile to life in long past epochs:

The ideal which, in asceticism and celibacy, taught a supposedly higher form of life and thus drained infinite strength from the family and the folk. Here the replacement has been radical, and the effect of this conversion from the preaching of death to the high image of perfect life will secure our folkish future. But now that we have gone over a number of ideas concerning the nature and significance of family, clan and folk, it seems necessary to me to add a warning against overestimating thoughts themselves. For it is too easy for man, in the joy of invention and discovery of the new age, to believe that with the knowledge of biology and statistics, with the demands and forms of his intellect, he has touched the ultimate essence of those mighty forces which, in procreation, birth and selection, lead from the family to the folk, from the past into the future. And occasionally voices are raised that see hereditary laws and sober ideas of purpose as the legitimate successors to the romantic feeling of love that is supposedly so outmoded today. But from the deepest depths of life itself springs that incomprehensible force which brings the sexes together. Imperceptibly, almost unconsciously, it directs drives and feelings towards each other, delicately and gently and yet with irresistible force. It does not think and does not want, the superstructure is far away from it, and yet it mysteriously achieves its ends. It fills the person and lets him be completely himself, and at the same time it lets him forget himself and become completely absorbed in the other. It encloses the lovers in the magic circle of their own world, but precisely through this it works out of him into the distance and expanse. Where the fleeting moment of the deepest happiness stretches into eternity for the feeling, the spark of life really leaps out of the other. Where the fleeting moment of deepest happiness stretches to eternity for the feeling, the spark of life leaps in truth from the present into the undreamed-of future. Mysterious and sublime at the same time is this realm of love to which humanity owes its existence. Today we have enough freedom and sobriety of spirit to see the natural in its beauty and violence and to call it unbiased. But we also do not want to forget the spiritual wealth that this world contains. It is one of the highest goods of life, one of the strongest driving forces in all its fields, one of the most delicious things that the individual can encounter on his life’s journey. In a thousand tongues the poets sing the miracle of true love, in the tones of the masters it resounds, it guides a thousand times the chisel of the artist through the shining marble, it moves the thinkers and strengthens the great of history in their heavy work, and only the small and weak would like to deny it and flee from it into the deified world of mere understanding.

But it kills everything original, for its deepest springs bubble up in the mysterious, and only the exuberance of the heart and the shuddering awe find their way to them.

Let us not forget this, if today we know and think more of what ultimately wants to be felt and lived. We want to educate a new generation, bright and brave in the awareness of its spirit, strong and beautiful in body, rich and proud in its genuine feeling, which sustains the folk by making the individual happy, and elevates us to gods when it fills man.