

*F. Hale*

---

# APPROPRIATING THE CLOSURE OF JESUIT MISSIONS: FRITZ HOCHWÄLDER'S *DAS HEILIGE EXPERIMENT*

## ABSTRACT

Since the eighteenth century the history of the Jesuit missionary endeavours in South America, especially their forced closure in 1760s, has been used rhetorically by writers in several genres, providing them with historical evidence to support a variety of latter-day causes. During the Second World War the Viennese Jewish playwright Fritz Hochwälder, then living in exile in Switzerland, followed in this tradition when he wrote his tragedy, *Das heilige Experiment*. It was a timely plea for toleration and religious freedom. Though almost completely ignored in histories of the Society of Jesus, this work vividly illustrates how a dramatic event in the history of Christianity can speak to subsequent issues.

Since the eighteenth century, Jesuit missions in South America, especially the model communities, or *reducciones*, established amongst the Guaraní and their forced closure in the 1760s, have served as an arsenal in which writers in several genres have found evidentiary historical weapons for supporting their contemporary causes.<sup>1</sup> As I have pointed out elsewhere, when Voltaire had reason to believe that representatives of the Society of Jesus on that continent as well as in Europe were abusing their power and treating people in a manner which violated his sense of dignity and his understanding of the rise of the human race from barbarism to a cultivated state, he pilloried them mercilessly in *Candide* (1759). On the other hand, when the Jesuits came under fire as the victims of authoritarianism and were banned from several European countries and their colonies overseas, Voltaire could just as readily dash to their defence and seek to call attention to the discrepancy between their accomplishments and the way

---

1 For the general history of these communities founded by Jesuit missionaries, see Philip Caraman, *The Lost Paradise: An account of the Jesuits in Paraguay, 1607-1768* (London: Sidgwick and Jackson, 1975).

in which both secular authorities and the Vatican were handling them.<sup>2</sup> Much more recently, the renowned screenwriter Robert Bolt adapted his original script for the film *The mission* (1986) to bolster the defence of Latin American liberation theology.<sup>3</sup>

In the present article I shall examine how the renowned Austrian Jewish playwright Fritz Hochwalder, no less than other writers who have exploited the same theme, appropriated the closure of the Jesuit missions in his dramatised plea for toleration and religious freedom during the Second World War. His case adds a particularly significant dimension to the testing of this hypothesis because unlike most of the other *litterateurs* who have dealt with the Jesuits, he did not emerge from even a nominally Christian family, although as a child and young man in Vienna he unquestionably had considerable exposure to Roman Catholicism in a country where the ties between that ecclesiastical tradition and the state had been strong for many centuries. No less importantly, this author wrote in response to direct ethnic and religious oppression and may therefore have believed he could empathise, if only by analogy, with the Guaran to some extent.

## 1. FRITZ HOCHWALDER AS RELIGIOUS LITERARY ARTIST

To any literary scholar who derives meaning from the study of the historical context in which texts arise, the relationships between Hochwalder's place in twentieth-century European history and his dramatic presentation of events which had taken place nearly 200 years earlier will be obvious and significant. He was born on 28 May 1911 in Vienna to Leonhard and Therese (*nee* Konig) Hochwalder. The social and professional standing of this family contradicts the indefensible stereotype of Viennese Jews as intellectuals. Leonhard Hochwalder was a self-employed upholsterer, while his wife supplemented the family's modest income by keeping a small curio shop in the same building. Fritz attended primary school in Vienna and subsequently augmented his meagre formal education through participation in various evening courses at a public school called Volksheim. He followed in his father's professional footsteps and in 1936 earned his *Meisterbrief* as a master upholsterer. The young craftsman opened his own one-man shop that year.<sup>4</sup>

---

2 Frederick Hale, "Literary images of Jesuit missions to the Guaran," *Missionalia* XXII, no. 1 (April 1994), pp. 42-60.

3 Frederick Hale, "The Mission as the cinema of Liberation Theology," *Missionalia*, XXIII, no. 1 (April 1995), pp. 72-91.

4 Frederic Morton, "Drama about Jesuits", *The New York Times*, 27 September 1953, p. 1.

With the spectre of ethnic persecution raising its ghastly head ever higher, Hochwalder in 1938 joined the stream of German-speaking Jews who sought refuge in Switzerland. He spent the rest of the decade and the entire Second World War in that country. Unable to secure a labour permit, Hochwalder was compelled to reside for much of this period in refugee camps. Though undoubtedly initially frustrating, this ultimately proved beneficial to his career, as it gave him a great deal of time for reading and writing.

*Das heilige Experiment* gave Hochwalder his breakthrough as a renowned playwright. He began to do serious research on the Jesuit enterprise in South America at the Central Library in Zurich, where he also read Dostoevsky's *The brothers Karamazov* and *The demons*. In fact, however, Hochwalder's first serious exposure to the history of the Society of Jesus had come two years before his departure from Austria when he read Rene Fulop-Miller's *Macht und Geheimnis der Jesuiten*.<sup>5</sup> When interviewed after the Second World War about the etiology of *Das heilige Experiment*, he attributed it in part to this work, in which both the accomplishments and the darker sides of the history of the Society of Jesus are emphasised. "From then on I had a theme working inside me, but not anchored yet to any dramatic structure," Hochwalder recalled. The National Socialist takeover of Austria and German expansion elsewhere in Europe provided that framework. Upon reading *The demons*, he was struck by Dostoevsky's prediction of "the danger of a faithless socialism which in its very materialistic faithlessness will acquire a religious tinge. Suddenly I felt the play focus inside me." This inspiration prompted Hochwalder to request a two-month leave of absence from the refugee labour camp in the canton of Ticino where he was then residing. This was granted late in 1941. Armed with a pencil and a modest amount of paper, the young Austrian went to the balcony of a house overlooking Ascona. Hochwalder initially hoped to use this period to work out the philosophical problems inherent in the play germinating in his mind, but his creativity accelerated to a level unprecedented in his brief career. At the end of his furlough, most of the manuscript was thus complete, albeit in a rudimentary and never published form titled *Die Jesuiten in Paraguay*.<sup>6</sup> This proto-text took less than three weeks to write in December 1941.<sup>7</sup>

It varied from the published and performed version in several respects. *Die Jesuiten in Paraguay* is structured in three acts, not five. Furthermore, the action takes place on two days, not one, and is at a *reduccion*, not in Buenos Aires. Some of the European characters who appear in *Das heilige Experiment* are

---

5 Rene Fulop-Miller, *Macht und Geheimnis der Jesuiten* (Berlin: Th. Knaur Nachf. Verlag, 1929).

6 *Ibid.*

7 Wilhelm Bortenschlager, *Der Dramatiker Fritz Hochwalder* (Innsbruck: Universitatsverlag Wagner, 1979), p. 64.

absent from *Die Jesuiten in Paraguay*, although there are more Guaraní. There is also a richly celebrated Feast of Saint Ignatius in the proto-text but not in the published version. The Jesuit Provincial is not a Spanish priest but a man who bears the German name Sepp. Eleven of the *reducciones* have already fallen victim to Spanish military might. In general there is considerably more action in the proto-text, whereas in its successor nearly everything that happens does so in a closed hearing. Moreover, several characters appear as more crude people in *Die Jesuiten in Paraguay* than they eventually become in *Das heilige Experiment*.<sup>8</sup> In itself, Hochwälder's proto-text is of little importance, although even a cursory comparison of it and the published version demonstrates that practically from the outset his dramatic depiction of the Jesuit undertaking amongst the Guaraní was artistically flexible and subject to modification. In a sense, his achievement with its use of rather than enslavement to objective historicity was nothing new. As indicated above, earlier writers had also interjected their own interests into the story of the Society of Jesus in South America, though not always intentionally.

Hochwälder refined the work during 1942, and the play debuted at the Städtebundtheater in Biel-Solothurn on 24 March 1943. It was warmly received, but the protraction of the war compelled Hochwälder to spend two more years in Switzerland. After peace returned to Europe, he decided against repatriation to Austria, from which his parents had been deported to die in a Nazi concentration camp. Hochwälder remained in Switzerland, residing in Zürich until his death in 1986. Owing in part to *Das heilige Experiment*, but also to such plays as *Der Unschuldige*, *Der öffentliche Ankläger*, and *Der Befehl*, he gained international acclaim as one of the most creative, if artistically conventional, German-language dramatists of the twentieth century, poles apart from innovators like Berthold Brecht.

## 2. PLOT SUMMARY

*Das heilige Experiment* is not particularly experimental. Its structure is fairly conventional, as the play is divided into five acts, each of which comprises several brief scenes. Hochwälder develops most of his characters vividly through dialogue and, to a lesser extent, stage instructions. The entire plot takes place on 16 July 1767 at the Jesuit College in Buenos Aires, chiefly in the office of the Provincial of the Society of Jesus, a Spaniard named Alfonso Fernandez. Hochwälder creates dramatic effect principally by building up various ideological and other conflicts, some of which are hinted at quite early in the play.

The first act begins when the superior of the Jesuits in Buenos Aires, Rochus Hundertpfund, introduces two Indian chiefs, Candia and Naguacu, to the

---

8 *Ibid.*, pp. 64-69.

Provincial. These two men request baptism. The first question the Provincial asks after ascertaining the purpose of their visit is more revealing than one might first surmise: "Ihr wollt seßhaft sein?" He also tips his hand in his second query: "Wie groß ist euer Stamm?" Only after ascertaining that Candia and Naguacu represent 7,000 of their ethnic fellows and that they wish to give up their nomadic life in favour of residence in Jesuit *reducciones* does the Provincial enquire about such spiritual and ethical matters as their willingness to serve Christ, obey the Jesuit fathers, give up their private possessions, cease to worship idols, and put aside their practice of polygyny. Candia also reveals something of his understanding of Christianity when he assures the Provincial: "Unter deiner Herrschaft, ehrwürdiger Vater, wird es unserm Volk nicht fehlen an Brot und Fleisch." The significance of this opening dialogue might be lost on many viewers of *Das heilige Experiment* or readers of the published version. In retrospect after the play is completed, however, it is apparent that from the outset both the Provincial and these two chiefs have divergent understandings of what constitutes Christianity and that their respective positions in this regard deviate to greater or lesser extents from the sacrifices inherent in the Christian discipleship of the New Testament.

A closely related matter in the first scene concerns a central missiological controversy. Missiologists in German-speaking countries long debated the respective merits of *Einzelbekehrung*, or the conversion of individuals, and *Volkschristianisierung*, or the mass Christianisation of tribes or other ethnic groupings, as the pivotal strategy of missionary endeavours. Advocates of the former position, many though certainly not all of them Protestants affiliated with various missionary societies, argued that it was unrealistic to expect that the lines of demarcation separating genuine converts from people who were not really accepting Christianity in any meaningful way, particularly ways involving a deep *metanoia*, or change of spiritual mind, were the same as the lines separating ethnic groups. Converts to Christianity, they contended, had to be made largely one by one. Their opponents conceded that by bringing large groups of people into the church simultaneously they ran the risk of creating visible churches that comprised both wheat and tares in abundance. This, however, they saw as inevitable in any church. Furthermore, proponents of *Volkschristianisierung* argued that they could perform a major service by imbuing ethnic groups with Christian values which would influence peoples generally, even though not all nominal converts thus affected were sincere. In its endeavours to Christianise the Americas, the Roman Catholic Church often tended to employ this latter strategy. Clearly that is the case in *Das heilige Experiment*.

In the second scene of Act One we discover that the work of the Society of Jesus is imperilled in Latin America. The Provincial, Hundertpfund, and Ladislaus Oros, a Hungarian priest who bears responsibility for the military defence of the *reducciones*, discuss briefly efforts by the Portuguese prime minister

Sebastião Carvalho to denigrate the endeavours of their order (including its suppression in Portugal in 1759)<sup>9</sup> but are confident that a delegation representing the Spanish Crown that has just landed in Buenos Aires will find nothing incriminating or otherwise improper in their mission. "In wenigen Stunden sind wir gerechtfertigt," Hundertpfund assures his fellows. Oros, however, remains wary. He reminds the others that Carvalho succeeded in his campaign to suppress the Jesuits in Portugal and that the order has also been expelled from France. The Provincial remains unshaken in his confidence, however, and contends that in the latter country the problems the Jesuits faced could be attributed to the Enlightenment, specifically the philosophy of d'Alembert.<sup>10</sup> The pope, this cleric believes, will protect the Society of Jesus in the New World. While the bishops of the Spanish colonies might pitch their tents in the camp of the white colonists, the Bishop of Rome would rise above their petty concerns.

Hochwälder introduces his first spokesman for secular colonial interests in the fourth scene of Act One. Jose Bustillos enters the Provincial's office and protests, in the name of his fellow Catholic merchants and landowners, against the work of the Jesuits which bedevils that of secular economic interests: "Das böse Beispiel sind Eure Indios für die unsern! Die Arbeit stockt. Es gibt noch Revolten, wenn Ihr das nicht abstellt!" When the Provincial asks what the Jesuits must halt, Bustillos replies: "Daß von Euren Indios erzählt wird, wie in Eurem Zauberstaat Milch und Honig fließt. Wie süß das Christentum wär ohne Sklaventreiber. Und so." Echoing a familiar refrain that has been directed for centuries at missionaries operating on stations, this landowner further accuses the Jesuits of enticing labourers away from the *estancias*, or farms, and, in one of the very few instances of humorous irony that Hochwälder has inserted into this text, bluntly asks these missionaries to leave "unser Paraguay" and "Geht zurück, woher ihr gekommen seid!"

In the fifth, sixth, seventh, and eighth scenes of Act One, all of which are very brief, Hochwälder introduces André Cornelis, a trader from the Netherlands who buys tea from the *reducciones*. This character has two principal functions. First, his willingness to pay a premium for superior tea grown by free Guaraní as opposed to that produced by slaves on the *estancias* underscores the economic validity of the Jesuit experiment. Secondly, Cornelis is a third-party commentator on the controversy between the Jesuits and the secular interests with whom they are in conflict. The fact that he is not merely an alien in the Spanish Empire, but

9 For Carvalho's part in the international suppression of the Jesuits, see Marcus Cheke, *Dictator of Portugal: A life of the Marquis of Pombal, 1699-1782* (London: Sidgwick and Jackson Ltd., 1938) and Kenneth Maxwell, *Pombal, Paradox of the enlightenment* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1995).

10 Jean Le Rond d'Alembert (1717-1783), a French geometer and philosopher, assisted Diderot in the preparation of the Encyclopaedia and wrote its "Discours Preliminaire".

also a Calvinist, also makes him a nearly disinterested commentator in the brooding dispute. Near the end of their congenial negotiating session, this prescient businessman assures the Provincial: “Wenn ich für Euch einmal was tun kann, Provinzial, wenn Ihr ein Asyl braucht — wir Niederländer geben auch den Jesuiten Zuflucht.” To the cleric’s remark that he must be joking, Cornelis declares solemnly in an unsubtle portent, “Ihr seid verloren.” The Provincial seems at this stage to be of divided mind, however, wavering between worldly fatalism and ultimate idealism. He declares on the one hand that the work of the Society of Jesus is “unaufhaltsam” but on the other confesses, “Gewiß, einmal wird auch unser Staat fallen. Aber das Experiment ist gelungen. Es wird wiederholt werden. In Jahrhunderten.” In the penultimate and final scenes of the first act, Don Pedro de Miura, who represents the Spanish Crown and shall conduct the hearing into the affairs of the Society of Jesus, arrives and greets his old friend the Provincial cordially but informs him cryptically that he must take measures that will be unpleasant, the first of which will be to prevent anyone from leaving the compound until the proceedings are completed. In doing so, he explains, he is merely following orders. More grave is Miura’s courteous but blunt announcement that for the same period he is taking the Jesuits there into protective custody.

Most of Act Two is given to the hearing. Its nine scenes reveal that Miura, at least on the surface, conducts it fairly. The pithy dialogue also sheds light on the Jesuits’ attitudes towards the Guaraní and the effects of these perspectives on their missionary undertaking. In the opening scene, which takes place immediately before the hearing, two Spanish colonists, Don Esteban Arago and Don Miguel Villano, discuss the difficulty they have had in gathering incriminating evidence against the Jesuits. In their dialogue the former didactically lists the charges against the order as infidelity to the Crown, oppression of the Guaraní, and concealing from the Crown secret silver mines and, presumably, failing to pay taxes on great wealth accrued from them.

When the hearing commences, Miura again emphasises that he is merely obeying orders. There is no prosecutor; in a curious twist, the Provincial is required to state the charges against the Society of Jesus. These are partly a paraphrase of Arago’s remarks made a few minutes earlier, though formulated more sharply. The Provincial declares, for example, that the Society of Jesus maintains a sovereign state in South America, that he and his colleagues keep the Guaraní in “Unfreiheit und Sklaverei”, and that the business practices of the *reducciones* yield usurious profits that are inimical to the interests of the Spanish Empire. Miura’s interrogation of the Provincial on each of these charges indicates that they are all unsubstantiated. Indirectly, this section of the dialogue casts aspersions on the practices and religious hypocrisy of the Spanish settlers, which thereby serve as a negative foil to the ways and sincerity of the Jesuits. This emerges most vividly when Miura questions the Provincial about

the order's desire to maintain distance between indigenous converts to their faith and the European colonists by creating the *reducciones*: "Weil das Christentum der Indios schwindet, wenn sie mit andern spanischen oder portugiesischen Christen zusammenleben."

Along with this indictment of the settlers, the second scene of Act Two sheds light on the Provincial's perception of his order's undertaking and its missionaries' attitudes towards the Guaraní. When Miura asks him why the Jesuits have founded a state in the wilderness and expanded in a secular sense, the Provincial insists: "Wir breiten uns nicht weltlich aus. Der Staat an sich ist uns gleichgültig. Aber es ist hier in Paraguay nicht anders möglich gewesen, als über mühevollen irdischen Umweg die Seelen für Christus zu gewinnen." He appears not to comprehend the tension in this statement between denying secular expansion and acknowledging the use of secular means to achieve a religious end. Not until the closing scenes of *Das heilige Experiment* does the Provincial grasp the difficulties wrought by this contradiction in his mind.

The attitude towards the Guaraní in general poses a lesser problem, though one which is part and parcel of the overall missionary predicament. The Provincial is in fact aware of the state of dependency in which these indigenous converts are held, yet he fails to comprehend the magnitude of this situation or its responsibility for other conflicts. When Miura asks him why the Jesuits refuse to withdraw from the midst of their converts, the Provincial reveals that he and his fellows have taken an utterly paternalistic approach to missionary work which reinforces the dependency of the people whom they have evangelised and keeps them in a state of virtual childhood. "Die Indios sind es gewöhnt, daß wir für sie denken," he informs the Spanish official. "Aus unser Hand empfangen sie ihr Brot, aus unserer Hand empfangen sie Lohn und Strafe. Ich glaube nicht, daß sie auch andern Priestern gehorchen würden."

Hochwälder explores another dimension of this theme in the third scene of Act Two. Miura questions Carlos Gervazoni, the bishop of Buenos Aires, about his relationship to the Society of Jesus and that order's place in the ecclesiastical life of the colony. This ecclesiastical official remarks that his immediate predecessor was recalled to Spain for becoming too closely allied with established interests in Buenos Aires, although Hochwälder does little to pursue this theme. The bishop insists that he is a friend of the Jesuits, but his subsequent testimony undermines his assertion. Indeed, the central thrust of his remarks is that at least in his diocese the Society of Jesus is no longer what it once was: "Aber bei allem Respekt, den ich der Gesellschaft schulde, muß ich doch feststellen: was die Jesuiten in Paraguay aufrichten, entspricht nicht mehr dem ursprünglichen Ziel des Ordens." When Miura asks what that original intent was, the Provincial gives a stock answer which suggests that he has not adequately measured the Society's contemporary work under his supervision against that historic benchmark: "Die Bekehrung der Heiden zu Christus unter Verwendung der



jeweils geeigneten Mittel; das Ansehen der heiligen Kirche und des Heiligen Vaters zu mehren; *omnia ad majorem dei gloriam*." In his rejoinder, the bishop refuses to compromise his earlier statement and maintains that "die Gesellschaft Jesu hat in Paraguay eine verhängnisvolle Wandlung durchgemacht. Man mißbraucht die geistliche Macht und richtet eine schrankenlose weltliche Herrschaft über die armen Indios auf." His explanation of his accusation is an amalgam of envy and cultural and political resentment. The bishop explains that the Jesuits have prohibited the Guaraní at their *reducciones* to have social intercourse with the settlers or even learn the Spanish language. He reveals his imperialistic mentality by further admitting that the Jesuits have "behandelt alte spanische Edelleute wie Fremdlinge, wie Geächtete — und das in einem Land, das die Väter dieser Spanier erobert haben." The bishop resents the unwillingness of the Jesuits to allow him or other bishops to inspect their territory in Paraguay and their adduction of privileges granted them by the Spanish Crown to govern that area independent of episcopal scrutiny — "Privilegien, die den Grimm und die Bitterkeit der alten spanischen Christen erregen müssen." One wonders whether he is any less beholden to these Spanish-Americans than was his predecessor. His frustration in this regard is further heightened because his appeals to the Vatican for special permission to enter the Jesuit mission territory have also come to naught. "Leider sieht man drüben in Europa, wenn man von Paraguay spricht, nur den äußerlich blendenden Erfolg der Heidenmission ...". Foreshadowing a concluding theme in the drama, this bishop, despite his inability to inspect the mission at first-hand, asserts that the endeavour has been counter-productive:

Man hat unter dem Vorwand der Religion eine Utopia aufgerichtet, die den Indios Nahrung, Kleidung, Sorglosigkeit, Sicherheit bringen sollte. Und man hat, anstatt aus Heiden wahre Christen zu machen, aus heidnischen Indios schnöde Materialisten gemacht.

The Christianity of the Guaraní runs shallow, he believes: "Wenn Christus nicht Brot, Fleisch, Herba-Maté garantiert, hat man kein Interesse fürs Christentum." What the bishop fails to clarify during the hearing is his understanding of what Christianity is and how missionary endeavours should accordingly be conducted.

Miura continues the hearing by calling four Spanish colonists to the stand, namely the previously mentioned Arago and Bustillos as well as Alvaro Catalde, who identifies himself as a merchant but who in the *dramatis personae* is listed as the owner of an *estancia*, and Garcia Quesada, about whom an identical contradiction of identity exists. Economic self-interest drives their testimonies. They accuse the Jesuits of sending agents of propaganda from the *reducciones* into the cities and to their estates to convince their labourers to flee and join them in their model communities. Bustillos emphasises, ingenuously or other-

wise, “Wär Not, wir Spanier nähmen selbst die Sense in die Hand!” Through him, Hochwälder then broaches an even more far-reaching theme to which he returns late in the play. “Das Reich am Parana wächst. Wir stehen hier mit dem Rücken zum Meer,” Bustillos complains:

Ihr werdet sehen: in einigen Jahren liegen wir bösen, steuerzahlenden Spanier im Meer — und diese da haben in Paraguay das Reich Gottes aufgerichtet — will sagen: *ihr* Reich über lauter zufriedene, stinkende Indios.

His testimony adds a dimension of explicit racism to the interlocking issues of preserving the Spanish Empire and the economic interests of the colonists. Unlike the bishop, neither Bustillos nor any of the other lay settlers evinces the slightest concern for the spiritual well-being of the indigenes in their midst.

Catalde’s rôle is to call attention to the military aspect of the *reducciones*. Referring to a Jesuit at the hearing who is wearing spurs and who is later identified as Ladislaus Oros, a former Hungarian military officer who was decorated for his exploits in uniform before taking his vows, Catalde informs Miura that the Society of Jesus has an army of considerable size, weapons factories, and munitions depots in its Paraguayan territory. He insinuates that this force comprising indigenous soldiers is not merely for defensive purposes but poses a threat to Spanish hegemony in parts of South America.

In the fifth and sixth scenes of Act Two, Hochwälder dismisses the superficial charge of unfair economic practices as irrelevant to the disposition of this case. Father William Clarke, the procurator of the Society of Jesus in that province, testifies that far from underselling the Spanish colonial tea farmers, the Jesuits actually can demand a higher price for the leaves they sell on behalf of the Guaraní. Cornelis corroborates this, explaining that the tea produced under benevolent labour practices at the *reducciones* is superior to that grown by slaves under exploitative conditions on Spanish-American plantations. When Miura asks this Netherlander whether the Indians are lazy, the Protestant Cornelis states that he has received special dispensation to visit the Jesuit mission territory and gives a qualified reply:

Ja — als Sklaven under der Peitsche, da sind sie faul. Aber in den Siedlungen, wo man sie nicht schindet, sechs Stunden Arbeit am Tag, und dann: Musik, Nahrung in Mengen — und Gottesdienst!

The final testimony which Miura hears is that of Oros. This rugged Magyar priest shares some of the Provincial’s attitude towards the indigenous population, stating that “aus wilden Kriegshaufen haben wir Jesuiten disziplinierte Regimenter gemacht.” He explains that the total force that can be mobilised comprises 30,000 men. In response to Miura’s questioning, Oros adds that his defence structure includes cannon factories and that some of the *reducciones*

manufacture rifles and ammunition in quantities sufficiently large to provide for the army's needs. The charge of disloyalty to the Spanish Crown evaporates when Oros informs Miura that his army has engaged in combat no fewer than forty times to protect parts of the Spanish Empire, although the precise nature of these engagements is not specified. At the same time, Oros emphasises that his fully obedient forces have no aggressive intentions and that their purpose is "jedem mit der Waffe zu begegnen, der Gottes Staat in Paraguay vernichten will." Returning to an evolving theme, Miura remarks that "Gottes Staat hat sich sehr weltlich umgetan!"

*Das heilige Experiment* arguably reaches its climax early, in the eighth scene of Act Two. Miura asks everyone except the Provincial to leave the room. Miura then appears to have reached his decision when he informs the Jesuit official that the accusations raised against the order are clearly false. Elated, the Provincial declares gleefully, "Ihr werdet uns endgültig davon reinwaschen!" He has spoken too soon. In one of the pithiest lines in this drama, Miura replies, "Ihr seid bereits verurteilt." He explains that in Madrid several months earlier the king uncritically accepted as valid the false charges raised against the Society of Jesus. The hearing in Buenos Aires, in other words, has been a charade, or at best, a *pro forma* proceeding. Miura hands a royal letter to the Provincial, who reads it aloud:

Da es erwiesen ist, daß die Jesuiten in Paraguay Unserer Krone abtrünnig geworden; da es erwiesen ist, daß sie unter dem Vorwand der Religion Sklaverei und Bedrückung unter Meinem indianischen Volk aufgerichtet, da es erwiesen ist, daß sie sich durch Verheimlichung von Bergwerken bereichert; da es erwiesen ist ... befehle ich kraft Meiner höchster Gewalt, die der Allmächtige in Meine Hände niedergelegt hat, daß alle Ordenspersonen der Gesellschaft Jesu die paraguayischen Provinz zu räumen haben und daß ihre Güter eingezogen werden. Gegeben zu Buen Retiro, am 27. Februar 1767. ICH, KÖNIG.

Incensed at being found guilty without due process of law, the Provincial declares that the verdict is invalid and concludes that the king has been deceived, an opinion which Miura can only confirm. Indeed, the royal emissary sympathises with the Provincial and assures him that he cannot carry out the verdict and will report accordingly to the king upon his return to Spain. Nonetheless, Miura makes it clear that the die have been cast. "Aber euer Staat — euer Staat muß fallen!" When the Provincial naïvely asks how such injustice can be justified, Miura evades the issue in this particular case by making two categorical assertions: "Wir alle tun Unrecht. Da ist kein Staat in dieser Welt, der nicht mit himmelschreiendem Unrecht beladen wäre." What is at issue, he makes clear, are not the moral issues debated during the hearing. Ironically, precisely because the Jesuits have done well their experiment must end. Miura's words are severe: "Und eben, *weil* ihr recht habt, müßt ihr vernichtet

werden! Vernichtet — rücksichtslos vernichtet!" It is a question of *Realpolitik*, he explains, with the future of the Spanish Empire supposedly at stake, as indeed Bustillos had hinted in his comment that the expansion of the *reducciones* threatened to drive the colonists into the sea. Thus is added yet another basic conflict to the matrix of confrontations which comprise *Das heilige Experiment*, namely altruism versus the brute force of nationalism. In a central moral lesson of this tragedy, Miura admits that irony rules: "Wir dehnen uns durch unsere Kriege aus — ihr durch euren Frieden. Wir bröckeln ab. Ihr sammelt an." He extrapolates the success of the Jesuits in central South America and concludes that their undertaking perils the position of the Spanish Crown there. "Morgen habt ihr fünfunddreißig Siedlungen. In einigen Jahren siebzig. Wie lange dauert es noch — und euch gehört der ganze Kontinent!" The Provincial's idealistic understanding of the *reducciones* has no cogency in the ears of this royalist. "Dieses Experiment ist heilig! Wer es anrührt, wer es freventlich stört, sündigt an Gott!" the cleric warns. Miura leaves no doubt about the priorities of the people whom he represents: "Sprecht nicht von Religion, wo unsere Interessen auf dem Spiel stehen!" When the defiant and embittered Provincial insists that no worldly power can compel him to abandon the experiment, Miura poses the historical dilemma which the Society of Jesus faced in the 1760s:

Eure Weigerung wäre der Untergang Eures Ordens im ganzen spanischen Weltreich! Überlegt: in Frankreich und Portugal ist die Gesellschaft Jesu verboten. Wir lassen Euch im ganzen spanischen Reich bestehen — wenn ihr Euch aus Paraguay freiwillig zurückzieht.

The Provincial protests against this unveiled extortion. To Miura, however, the ends justify the means: "Für das Wohl meines Landes nehme ich jedes Mittel in Kauf." He repeats the ultimatum for dramatic effect: "Paraguay — oder der Orden, Pater Provincial."

The attempts to resolve this dilemma, while not really anticlimactic, never rise to the same level of dramatic tension which the conflicts during the hearing and in the confrontation between Miura and the Provincial establish. In the ninth scene of Act Two, the Provincial informs Oros, who enters his office, that an attempt is afoot to destroy God's state. Ever defiant, the spur-wearing Oros declares that he is willing to begin the resistance. Hochwälder then restates — perhaps superfluously — a fundamental conflict of loyalties to worldly and spiritual powers that has arisen. "Hier gilt nur ein Recht — das Recht des Königs," Miura asserts. The Provincial counters: "Hier gilt nur *ein* Recht — das Recht Gottes!" In the name of that law, he then arrests Miura, who responds by wondering aloud how the Jesuits can now regard themselves as innocent.

In Act Three, Hochwälder addresses directly the purpose of missionary work and, by implication, of Christianity in general. Again, this question is posed in terms of conflicting views with which he attempts to create another height in

dramatic effect. Rather than pitting the Jesuits against secular powers, however, Hochwalder resorts to a facile and entirely gratuitous theatrical device to place the conflict squarely within the Society of Jesus. This takes place during a confrontation between the Provincial and a shadowy character named Lorenzo Querini, who has just arrived in Buenos Aires and been a peripheral auditor during the hearing, his presence there required by Miura's closure of the Jesuit college in which it has taken place. In a symbolic gesture, Querini strides behind the desk and sits down in the Provincial's chair, thus taking a posture of authority. Shocked by this affront, the Provincial demands to know his identity. Querini replies in Latin: "*Minimus servus servorum in nomine societatis Jesu.*" The Provincial refuses to accept this until Querini states that the General of the order has sent him to Buenos Aires incognito as his legate to investigate matters. Believing that Querini can extricate him and his fellow Jesuits from their predicament, the Provincial is momentarily elated until the legate unexpectedly orders him to restore power to the Miura and the other Spanish officials. The two men argue briefly about the merits of the case against the Jesuits. When the Provincial insists that the king issued his decree only after being deceived and lied to, Querini deflates his hope of an immediate resolution of the dilemma and, presumably, increases his disillusionment by stating bluntly, "Das ist mir gleichgultig."

Their subsequent conversation goes straight to the heart of the matter when Querini makes it clear that his understanding of the Society of Jesus' task is almost diametrically opposed to that of Provincial and, in turn, at odds with the goals of the *reducciones*. To the puzzlement of the Provincial, the legate goes so far as to declare that the Jesuits bear massive guilt for what they have done in Paraguay. Querini's understanding of the task of Jesuit ministry is entirely otherworldly. He contrasts what has been done in Paraguay with what the order should be doing:

Und wir, die wir genau wissen, da wir im Grund machtlos sind, wir haben uns um aueren Erfolges willen selbst in die Netze der Macht verstrickt — wir, die wir frei von Parteinahme in allen Landern der verzweifelnden, unterdruckten, leidenden Menschheit den Weg zu ebnen haben in jenes Reich, in das uns alle erst der Tod entlat.

Querini sees no possibility of in any way establishing the Kingdom of God amongst sinful people and sees the Jesuit experiment with its *reducciones* as a doomed effort to do precisely that through literal adherence to the commands of Christ: "In einer Welt, in der unausrottbar Habgier und Niedertracht herrschen, haben wir uns unterfangen, das reine Wort Christi in die Tat zu setzen." In an implicit allusion to the ethics of the New Testament, the Provincial accuses Querini of thereby allying with worldly powers rather than maintaining solidarity with the poor. Surprisingly, the legate immediately agrees and does

so with apparent enthusiasm: “Ja, gewiß. Gerade an der Seite der Gewalt ist unser Platz.” He seeks to justify this position by arguing that the powerful need the ministry of the Jesuits: “Im Herzen der Grausamen und Mächtigen müssen wir die christlichen Tugenden erwecken.” What the purpose of such an endeavour should be, however, and what relationship the awakening of Christian virtues is to the establishment of the Kingdom of God, Querini leaves a mystery.

The Provincial seeks to steer the discussion back to the Guaraní, though without arguing their case explicitly on Querini’s terms by mentioning their need for the morality of the Gospel. Instead, the Provincial merely finds it regrettable that the withdrawal of the Jesuits from Paraguay will cut off hundreds of thousands of unconverted Guaraní from Christian salvation. Querini’s initial response to this is no less shocking than some of Miura’s remarks. “Diese Art von Christen sind uns nicht erwünscht,” he declares flatly. Querini contends that the poor and wretched of the earth distort Christianity: “Sie nehmen unsere heilige Religion als Schutz, Nahrung, Sorglosigkeit, wohlwollende und gerechte Führung.” He fails to mention that the wealthy and powerful people of Christendom — a category which would presumably include himself and countless others of his stripe — have also long appropriated the Gospel to serve their economic and other worldly ends, using religion as a means of legitimising their power and a tool for the exploitation of the weak, both Christian and non-Christian. That Hochwälder was incognizant of this tendency, which had long been a target of both Marxist and non-Marxist critics in German-speaking countries, is implausible, although he does not explore the theme explicitly in *Das heilige Experiment*.

In any case, the Provincial does not immediately capitulate. He insists that there is a linkage between social ministry and salvation. When Querini declares that the task is to save souls, the Provincial replies that it will be impossible to do so if people are left to the mercy of their oppressors. “Eindeutig müssen wir unseren Platz beziehen an der Seite der Mühseligen und Beladenen,” he affirms. Querini is equally intransigent, however, maintaining that to do so would be imprudent. “Es brächte unserer heiligen Religion unermeßlichen Schaden,” he states cryptically. When the Provincial retorts that Christianity will have failed if the Jesuits withdraw from Paraguay, the legate counters that the faith will have retained its purity. Again he couches his argument in extremely reproachful language: “Ohne von uns bemerkt zu werden, hat sich Satan in unser Werk geschlichen.” His argument continues to predicate the total incompatibility of the Kingdom of God and the present world. Hochwälder again relies on a Swiss Calvinist allusion in underscoring this point. “Wodurch unterscheidet sich noch der Staat der Jesuiten von der Genfer Republic des Erzketzers Calvin?” asks Querini, who clearly holds no brief for the theocratic model of church-state relations. The Provincial has no answer to this rhetorical query, but in a last-ditch effort to save the *reducciones* he invites the legate to visit them. Querini refuses this offer, however, and merely imposes Jesuit discipline to which the Provincial assents.

The Provincial despairs. In the extremely brief fifth and final scene of Act Three, he appears as a symbolic quasi-Christ figure. At his desk he attempts to pray and, grasping his crucifix, finally utters petitions corresponding to the death of Christ on Calvary. “*Anima Christi, sanctifica me — Corpus Christi, salve me — Sanguis Christi, inebria me — Aqua lateris Christi, lava me.*” The Provincial briefly places himself on the cross and asks in words reminiscent of Christ’s moment of despair, “O mein Gott! — Warum verlässest du immer wieder diese Welt — warum?”

The Provincial finally relents. At the beginning of the fourth act, he gathers Hundertpfund, Clarke, and Oros in his office and instructs them to co-operate with the Spanish in the surrender of the *reducciones*. All three of these non-Spanish Jesuits initially protest but soon appear to yield to his unwelcome command in accordance with their vow of obedience. In the following scene the Provincial similarly commands several Guaraní to vacate the *reducciones* and submit to Spanish imperial rule. The indigenes discuss this amongst themselves in his presence. Their dialogue focuses on their perception of Christianity and the contrast between the Christ of the Spanish and that which the Jesuits have given them. The Provincial dismisses their pleas that submission to the colonists will bring economic devastation and ultimately genocide. “Ihr müßt euer Kreuz auf euch nehmen ... Gedenkt der Leiden Unseres Herrn,” he suggests in words which the situation gives a hollow ring. It belatedly occurs to the Provincial that the appeal of Christianity to the Guaraní is something different from that which he and his fellow missionaries have intended. He asks Hundertpfund to fetch Candia and Naguacu, the two chiefs who earlier that day requested baptism. “Ich will ergründen, was ihnen Christus so begehrenswert macht,” he explains.

In the third scene of Act Four, the militant Oros revokes his promise to co-operate in the disbanding of the Guaraní military force. His action adds another dimension of conflict to the plot, as it pits him against the Provincial, who continues to insist on conventional Jesuit obedience to one’s superiors. “Das Gehorsamsgelübde is aufgehoben, wenn der Vorgesetzte zur Sünde verleitet,” Oros explains in seeking to justify his unwillingness to obey. He announces that he will fight to his last breath alongside his indigenous soldiers. In the exchange which immediately follows, Hochwälder injects another element of irony into the plot. The Provincial expels him on the spot from the Society of Jesus. “Vielleicht sind wir alle längst keine Jesuiten mehr!” the banished priest replies. The seeming paradox lies in the fact that Oros, who more than any of his fellow Jesuits has employed worldly means in his role as a missionary, should imply that the order has departed from its original ideals. To be sure, this is in itself problematical, given the military background of Ignatius Loyola and the willingness of the Society of Jesus to engage in secular pursuits practically from the outset. Oros seems to be aware of this. He accuses the Provincial of deserting the flag — presumably either that of Jesuit tradition or of the

*reducciones* — and insists that the Provincial will not succeed in reversing the order's achievement amongst the Guaraní.

In the fourth scene the increasingly disillusioned Provincial questions Candia and Naguacu more deeply about their desire to become Christians and particularly about why they wish to be baptised by the Jesuits rather than by secular priests responsible to the bishop of Buenos Aires. Candia answers succinctly: "Der Christus des Bischofs is nicht der eure." He and Naguacu explain that the Christ of the *reducciones* gives food, clothing, accommodation, weapons, and protection from slave-traders. The theologically ignorant Candia professes what the theologically informed would call works righteousness: "Wenn man ihn verehrt, wird man belohnt." The Provincial realises that the Christ of the Guaraní mind is not that of the cross. "Das ist der Christus, den wir euch gebracht haben," he comments wistfully on the indigenes' image of their Saviour. "Oh — ihr seid von uns getäuscht worden. Christus verleiht keine Sicherheit, ernährt nicht, bekleidet nicht — er selbst ist arm und bloß ..."

Fighting between the Guaraní and Spanish troops erupts outside the Jesuit college. Neither Oros nor his soldiers evince the slightest willingness to obey the Provincial. When that cleric ventures outside and commands the shooting to cease, he is wounded by gunfire. Whether a Spanish soldier, a Guaraní, or Oros has shot him remains a tantalising but unanswered question.

In any case, the injured Provincial staggers back into his office and in the terse seventh scene of Act Four utters his strongest words of the entire play shortly before his death. Summoning his last modicum of energy, he tears from the wall the map of the Jesuit mission territory which has served repeatedly as an incisive symbol of the order's achievement in Paraguay and declares that no individual person has wounded him: "Dieses ... hat ... es getan! Mein ... eigenes ... Werk ... Dieser Staat — der Antichrist!!" On the wall remains only a portrait of Saint Francis Xavier, the first Jesuit foreign missionary in the sixteenth century. The symbolism of the transient and the permanent in the Society of Jesus is too unobvious to require comment. Quite unconcerned about Jesuit tradition, Miura, Villano, and Arago rejoice in their triumph. "Wir sind am Ziel," pronounces Miura in the eighth and final scene of Act Four. "Das Reich Gottes ist beim Teufel!"

The five-page fifth act contains *inter alia* Hochwälder's commentary, voiced chiefly through the Netherlander Cornelis, on the absurd counter-productivity of attempting to live by force, and the *coda* of the Provincial. Cornelis sarcastically congratulates Miura on his victory over the Jesuits. With the power of the sword, this international trader declares with no mean hyperbole, the Spanish have established an empire on which the sun never sets. Taking a torch out of its iron ring holder, however, Cornelis illuminates a slowly rotating globe and qualifies his praise. The Spanish have lost their possessions in the East



Indies, he remarks without noting that the Netherlands have inherited them, and the Netherlands themselves are no longer under the hegemony of the Spanish Crown. Their Calvinist churches, moreover, have survived Spanish Catholic efforts to eradicate them. No more a historian than Hochwalder, Cornelis adds the Philippines, Calicut, Goa, and the Cape of Good Hope to his verbal list of erstwhile Spanish possessions.

The principal speaker in the final act, though, is the Provincial, who seeks to come to terms with his beliefs and actions. He damns Oros, who has been sentenced to death for his part in the insurrection against the Spanish officials, for disobeying him and thereby supposedly bringing the Society of Jesus into disrepute. When Oros confesses his sin, however, the Provincial is sacramentally compelled to forgive him. Indeed, the Provincial believes he must do so in order for God to forgive his own sin. He explains that he too was disobedient because he briefly abandoned his ideals and took the side of the mighty, as Miura and Querini had commanded him. He contrasts his own behaviour with that of Saint Francis Xavier, whose labours as a missionary helped to bring the gospel to part of Asia unaccompanied by military force. The Provincial then dies.

In the final scene of *Das heilige Experiment* the other Jesuits present, minus Oros, who has been led out to die before a firing squad, kneel around their fallen leader and pray in Latin. Miura joins them, although he declares that his heart still burns for Spain and its king. He is of divided mind, however, and, quoting Matthew 16:26, asks: "Was hulfe es, wenn ich die ganze Welt gewonne, und nahme doch Schaden an meiner Seele ..."

### 3. CONCLUSION

Hochwalder was both a product of his time and a prophetic voice against the fascist movements which repeatedly reared its totalitarian head in it. *Das heilige Experiment* was not, of course, the only widely lauded drama in German which sought to alert viewers to the ills which the Third Reich represented; one thinks of such contemporary works as Bertolt Brecht's *Das aufhaltsame Aufstiege des Arturo Ui* in this regard.

That Hochwalder, writing in exile under what from both emotional and practical viewpoints were clearly exacting circumstances, would choose from many historical examples of the predicaments in which religious establishments have been placed during times of great duress elect that of the closure of the Jesuit missions testifies loudly to the enduring force of this chapter of ecclesiastical history. There is no reason to assume that Hochwalder selected it merely because he had access in Zurich to Fulöp-Miller's history which he had previously read in Vienna. It seems far more plausible to conclude that in this compelling story he believed he had discovered a brilliant historical mirror which

reflected, *mutatis mutandis* the grim reality of the moral quandary in which he found Europe during the 1940s.

What can be said about the role of Hochwalder's own religious beliefs in this regard? No attempt is made here to assess the depth of his commitment to the spiritual legacy of his forefathers or twentieth-century Jewish beliefs and practices. That Hochwalder found in the history of Judaism a treasure trove of religious and ethical significance is apparent; in this respect one need only consider his play *Esther*, which also stems from the early period of his exile in Switzerland. That said, it cannot be reasonably argued that his intellectual, literary, and spiritual identity could be summed up in Judaism. Like most of his religio-ethnic fellows in Austria, Hochwalder had been exposed to many other currents in Vienna and elsewhere. But apart from an inescapable awareness of persecution as a *Leitmotiv* in the history of European Judaism, one which had profoundly influenced the course of his own life, and the impact which this made on *Das heilige Experiment* in a broad, underlying sense, there is little in that tragedy which must be ascribed to its author's Jewishness. This work could have as easily come from the pen of a non-Jewish playwright.

*Keywords*

Fritz Hochwalder

*Das heilige Experiment*

Jesuit missions

*Trefwoorde*

Fritz Hochwalder

*Das heilige Experiment*

Jesuit sendingwerk