

5-2023

Political Religion: An Intellectual History of Eric Voegelin and Defense of His Thesis on Political Religion and Nazism

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Political Religion: An Intellectual History of Eric Voegelin and Defense of His Thesis on
Political Religion and Nazism

A Thesis

Submitted to the Graduate Faculty of the
University of New Orleans
in partial fulfillment of the
requirements for the degree of

Master of Arts

in

History

by:

Stephen Shea Gaines

B.A., Nicholls State University, 2020

May 2023

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Figure 1 Eric Voegelin's Second Passport

*This is Voegelin's second US passport photo from Voegelin's archived papers. It was taken during the 1960s after his time at LSU. Source: Box 1, folder 1, Eric Voegelin papers, Hoover Institution Library & Archives, Stanford, CA.

Thesis Abstract

This thesis is an intellectual history of Eric Voegelin and the concept of “political religion”. Eric Voegelin was a German-Austrian political scientist whose work surrounding the field of political science has made him one of the most influential thinkers of the 20th century. Voegelin saw the rise of Nazi Germany in 1932 and fled Austria during *Anschluss* in 1938 to escape Nazi persecution, coming to the United States. During this time, Voegelin published, *The Political Religions (Die Politischen Religionen)* in which he describes National Socialism as a “political religion”. This thesis will delve into the conceptualization of the term, how other scholars viewed Nazism as a political religion, and why Nazism is a political religion.

Introduction

During the infamous Nazi seizure of Austria on March 13th, 1938 known as the *Anschluss*, Eric Voegelin published one of the most influential works in his early career, *Die Politischen Religionen* (The Political Religions), in which he refers to National Socialism as a “political religion”.¹ His interpretation of the term, as well as its application to the Nazi Empire, was largely done as a project to understand the particular social anthropology (theory of human nature) of a variety of different civilizational traits shared by various societies throughout history which observed totalitarian tendencies in which Nazism acts as the most fitting example.² Although Voegelin retired the term during his academic career, this thesis will be a defense of the term “political religion” as it applies to Nazism as a situation in which the state commands absolute authority through self-deification and obedience to a dogmatic ideological revision of reality.

Voegelin conceived the term to describe the end process of secularization, in which the traditional religious beliefs of the given society were replaced with the dogmatic view of the state as the religion of the masses.³ As his academic career progressed, Eric Voegelin discontinued the usage of the term within the study of totalitarian ideologies like Nazism. He even rejected the term altogether and developed a new terminology in “Modern Gnosticism”

¹ Eric Voegelin, *The Collected Works of Eric Voegelin: Modernity Without Restraint: The Political Religions; The New Science of Politics; And Science, Politics, And Gnosticism*, ed. Manfred Henningsen, Vol. 5 (Columbia, MO, University of Missouri Press, 2000), 78.; Joseph W. Bendersky, *A Concise History of Nazi Germany* 4th ed (Lanham, MD: Rowman & Littlefield Publishers Inc., 2014), 158-160.

² Eric Voegelin, *Autobiographical Reflections*, ed. Ellis Sandoz (Baton Rouge, LA: Louisiana State University Press, 1989), 78, Kindle.; Voegelin, *Modernity Without Restraint*, 34-37, 43-49, 50-52, 53-66.

³ Voegelin was not alone in his assessment, as other influential scholars and thinkers like Carl Schmitt and Hannah Arendt developed similar conceptualizations and coin the terms “political theology” and “totalitarianism” respectively. Incidentally, Voegelin did have correspondence with Arendt on the concept of totalitarianism and cited Schmitt in some of his early works. Thierry Gontier, “From ‘Political Theology’ to ‘Political Religion’: Eric Voegelin and Carl Schmitt”, *The Review of Politics* 75, no. 1 (2013): 25–43, (here: 26-27), <http://www.jstor.org/stable/23355713>.; Voegelin, *Modernity Without Restraint*, 15.

which served as his main thesis for the majority of his academic career. In his book, *Autobiographical Reflections*, Voegelin states that the term “political religion”, while not incorrect in its assessment, the term itself was, “too vague and already deforms the real problem of experiences by mixing them with the further problem of dogma or doctrine.”⁴

Despite this, a vast number of historians have written about the concept of political religion. Some have directly labeled it as Nazism, as Voegelin did, while others have included other political ideologies like Communism and Italian Fascism as political religions. The academic conversation of political religion was often tied into other related terms like totalitarianism. As the introduction makes clear, there has been a lengthy discussion of how Nazism is conceived as a political religion, with many historians debating the validity of the term as it pertains to Nazism. Scholars such as Emilio Gentile, George Staunton, Michael Burleigh, and Philippe Burrin agree with Voegelin’s concept. Meanwhile, other scholars like Richard J. Evans and Richard Steigmann-Gall disagree with the collective interpretation, and argue that historical scholars should avoid using the term as proper means of analyzing Nazism.⁵

I firmly disagree with Evans and Steigmann-Gall, as I believe they are misunderstanding what Voegelin meant by the term, and thus, misunderstand the general thesis of Voegelin’s approach towards Nazism and various other ideologies that he criticized. For instance, Evans,

⁴ While at the archives of the Hoover Institution, I gained the opportunity to read some edited manuscripts of *Autobiographical Reflections*. See, Box 1 Folder 16 Eric Voegelin Papers, Hoover Institution Library & Archives, Stanford, CA.; See Also, Voegelin, *Autobiographical Reflections*, 78, Kindle.

⁵ Stanley G Payne, *A History of Fascism, 1914-1945* (London: Taylor & Francis, 2003), 199-201, Kindle.; Michael Burleigh, *The Third Reich: A New History* (London: Pan Books, 2001). 3-6, 8-11, 13, 252-258.; Emilio Gentile, and George Staunton, “THE LEVIATHAN AS A CHURCH: Totalitarianism and Political Religion,” *In Politics as Religion*, (2006) 45–67, accessed: 10/25/2022, <https://doi.org/10.2307/j.ctv14163w3.7>.; Philippe Burrin, “Political Religion: The Relevance of a Concept.” *History and Memory* 9, no. 1/2 (1997): 321–49, accessed Nov. 7, 2022, <http://www.jstor.org/stable/25681009>.; Richard J. Evans, “Nazism, Christianity and Political Religion: A Debate”, *Journal of Contemporary History* 42, no. 1, (2007): 5–7, accessed: 09/05/2022, <http://www.jstor.org/stable/30036424>.

Steigmann-Gall, and many other scholars mentioned above, leave the topic of religion as a vague concept, meaning that the concept of political religion is left vague. How can one agree or disagree with Voegelin's conception without detailing what they mean by the word "religion"? Do they think of religion as simply a strong belief in a moral order? Or do they mean a complex series of philosophical and theological beliefs conjoined within a worldview? Such answers are not truly forthcoming. Secondly, Voegelin does not say that the interpretation and analysis that he had of Nazism in *The Political Religions* was incorrect, but too vague and mixes the problem of experiences with the problem of doctrines and dogmas.

The object of this thesis is twofold. First, I shall provide an intellectual history of Eric Voegelin, his personal experience with Nazism, his overall outlook regarding ideologies (which is critical for this thesis), and how said outlook has evolved throughout his career. Second, I will discuss the origins of political religion as an idea and how historical scholarship has exposed and rejected the terminology and give a defense of the term "political religion" as it applies to Nazism, defending Voegelin's original thesis of 1938.

This thesis will include a revision of the term, from a term that Voegelin deemed too vague for any continued usage in his later works to a more applicable term using the critical-realistic approach to religion. In essence, instead of political religion denoting the occurrence of the state acting specifically as a divine authority to be openly worshiped by the populace, this thesis' definition of political religion is where the state, whether religious or non-religious, assumes the ultimate authority in matters of human anthropology and prescribes certain cultural practices and beliefs that must be upheld by the populace as the purest expression of their society. This approach not only allows us to accurately describe the phenomena of ideologies like Nazism, Communism, and Italian Fascism, but help clarify Voegelin's original thesis for

further use as a proper way of interpreting dogmatic ideological movements like Nazism and Communism as well as why people followed them.

This thesis will use historical evidence from primary sources for Voegelin's early works before he fled the Nazi annexation of Austria in 1938, such as *The Political Religions*, his later works on Nazism, such as *Hitler and the Germans*, and his much later work *Autobiographical Reflections*. His works like *The Political Religions*, *The New Science of Politics*, and *Science, Politics, and Gnosticism* were collected into an anthology called *Modernity Without Restraint*. This anthology shows the evolution of Voegelin's overall thesis and study of political ideologies as a political theorist. *The Political Religions* came out in press the same year as the Nazi seizure of Austria in 1938. Voegelin's extensive work, including the archival materials gathered from the Eric Voegelin Archives at the Hoover Institution will serve as the primary basis for this thesis. These works were published together in his collected works published by the University of Missouri Press thanks to them being written at important stages of his academic and personal life, with the earliest taking place during Voegelin's escape from impending capture at the hands of the Nazis, the second taking place as a seminal work within American academia, and the last being after his return to Germany after the horrors of Nazism, thus showing his progression as a thinker and influencer within the world of Western academia.⁶

The next two works, *Hitler and the Germans* and *Autobiographical Reflections* also were published during important times in his career. *Hitler and the Germans* is another collected volume of Voegelin's works while he taught at the University of Munich in 1964, but like *Science, Politics, and Gnosticism*, this is a collection of his lectures, which drew hundreds of

⁶ Voegelin, *Modernity Without Restraint*, 1-3.

students and scholars from various different fields and were published in a book even before the lectures were given.⁷ At this point, Voegelin had already made a name for himself in the university with his inaugural lecture. This weekly lectures on Nazism were delivered at the peak of his academic prowess as a teacher in Munich, Germany. And, because of the subject matter, as well as Voegelin's own antipathic nature towards German academia at the time, these lectures were very controversial, with the German press going so far as calling Voegelin an "arrogant sectarian" (as noted in a footnote in the editor's introduction).⁸

Autobiographical Reflections was produced by Voegelin in 1974. This took place after his return to America in 1969, a return that lasted until his death in 1985, where he held a five-year appointment at Stanford University as a Henry Salvatori Distinguished Scholar in the Hoover Institution on War, Revolution, and Peace, which now keeps his records, files, manuscripts, and notes.⁹ This was where his later work on the history of intellectual ideas *Order and History*, received its fourth edition *The Ecumenic Age*, which was published right before he retired from academic life in 1974.¹⁰ With his death in 1985, his four-thousand-page manuscript of *History of Political Ideas* was absorbed into his *Order and History* series, with eleven chapters of the *History of Political Ideas*, were drawn together and edited by Political Scientist, John H. Hallowell, and then published under the title, *From Enlightenment to Revolution* in

⁷ Eric Voegelin, *The Collected Works of Eric Voegelin: Hitler and the Germans*, ed. Detlev Clemens and Brandan Purcell, Vol. 31 (Columbia, MO: University of Missouri Press, 1999), 1.

⁸ Voegelin, *Hitler and the Germans*, 1.

⁹ Voegelin, *Autobiographical Reflections*, 16, Kindle.

¹⁰ Voegelin, *Autobiographical Reflections*, 16-17, Kindle. See Also, Eric Voegelin, *Order and History: The Ecumenic Age* (Baton Rouge, LA: Louisiana State University Press, 1974).

1975.¹¹ A fifth addition to that series, *In Search of Order*, being published posthumously in 1987 as a capstone project of Voegelin's philosophy of politics, history, and consciousness.¹²

¹¹ Voegelin, *Autobiographical Reflections*, 16-17, Kindle. See Also, Eric Voegelin, *From Enlightenment To Revolution*, ed. John H. Hallowell (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 1975).

¹² Voegelin, *Autobiographical Reflections*, 16-17, Kindle. See Also, Eric Voegelin, *Order and History: In Search of Order* (Baton Rouge, LA: Louisiana State University Press, 1987).

The Life of Eric Voegelin

Born Erich Hermann Wilhelm Voegelin (1901-1985), in Cologne, Germany in 1901 before moving to Vienna, Austria in 1910, Eric Voegelin was a German-Austrian political scientist who specialized in the fields of political science, philosophy, and history. Throughout his career, Voegelin taught at several universities and institutions such as the University of Vienna, the Louisiana State University, and the University of Munich.¹³ Being an open critic of the various political and intellectual movements within German academia during the 1930s, such as Hegelianism and Marxism, Eric Voegelin's career as an academic placed him at odds with one of the prevailing political movements of his day, Nazism, which stands as one of the few ideologies he criticized as a first-hand witness.¹⁴

Voegelin's first-hand experience with the Nazis during Austria's annexation was an event that shocked him to the core. As he reflected in his *Autobiographical Reflections*, he assumed that Austria was safe from being annexed by Nazi Germany on the basis that the Western democracies claimed to stand against such Nazi aggression to prevent another world war.¹⁵ Interestingly, one of his associates in the Italian Foreign Ministry in Rome told him that Mussolini held frantic telephone negotiations with the English government in the hopes of stopping the *Anschluss*. As Voegelin noted, his efforts were rejected.¹⁶ The event enraged Voegelin, not only because of the Nazis' obvious grasp for power but for the clear weakness of the Western powers. He even admitted to having, rather shortly, considered joining the National

¹³ Voegelin, *Autobiographical Reflections*, 15-17, Kindle.

¹⁴ Voegelin, *Autobiographical Reflections*, 75-77, Kindle.

¹⁵ Voegelin, *Autobiographical Reflections*, 70, Kindle.

¹⁶ Voegelin, *Autobiographical Reflections*, 70, Kindle.

Socialists out of spite for the West. But of course, as he himself admits, his clear moral disdain for Nazism prevented any such actions from being realized.¹⁷

In the midst of *Anschluss* in 1938, Voegelin was fired from his position at the University of Vienna thanks to his openly anti-Nazi views. He and his wife Lissy Onken Voegelin was forced to flee Vienna with the help of a Swiss journalist who was approached by the Gestapo at their home in search of Voegelin and leaving empty-handed upon hearing that Voegelin's passport was with the police as he was in the process of getting the exit visa.¹⁸ Both Voegelin and his wife gained passports through the help of their friends as well as an exit visa from the police before the Gestapo could catch them. Voegelin caught a train to Zurich, Switzerland with the help of his wife, who stayed with her parents as the Gestapo waited at their home to arrest Voegelin.¹⁹

From Zurich, Voegelin awaited a non-quota immigration visa for scholars looking to flee to the United States. His contact in the US was the functional head of the department of government at Harvard University, Arthur Holcombe, provided a part-time instructorship position, but Voegelin did not receive the official letter of invitation and waited in Zurich to receive his visa.²⁰ Ironically, because Voegelin was not Jewish, Catholic, or a Marxist, the American vice-consul in Zurich argued that Voegelin had no reason not to be a Nazi or at least have Nazi sympathies.²¹ The vice-consul was not the only one to make such claims about Voegelin. Twenty years later, Voegelin gave a lecture at the University of Salzburg in the 1960s

¹⁷ Voegelin, *Autobiographical Reflections*, 70, Kindle.

¹⁸ Voegelin, *Autobiographical Reflections*, 71, Kindle.

¹⁹ Voegelin, *Autobiographical Reflections*, 71, Kindle.

²⁰ Voegelin, *Autobiographical Reflections*, 71, Kindle.

²¹ Voegelin, *Autobiographical Reflections*, 72, Kindle.

with Marxist Philosopher Ernst Bloch, whose wife questioned why Voegelin had to leave.²² Even years after these events, Voegelin continued to deal with false accusations of being Jewish. He even filed a libel suit against H. Pfeifer for portraying him as Jewish.²³

Unfortunately, Voegelin was not alone in his troubles with Nazism. In 1936, the Nazis' ascension within Germany caused the expulsion of 1,145 German professors thanks to either their Jewish heritage or their political convictions.²⁴ 133 research scientists from non-university institutes like the Kaiser Wilhelm Society were dismissed as well. Shortly after the *Anschluss* in 1938, 418 academics were expelled from their positions in Austria. By 1940, upwards of 1,000 to 1,500 more followed, many of whom fled to Great Britain and the United States.²⁵ This uptick in intellectual displacement led to intellectual drainage as many German and Austrian scholars fled to Western nations like the UK and US, just as Voegelin did.

Many Jewish scholarly refugees did not face a warm welcome in the United States, as long-standing antisemitism from academics and officials hindered American Jews from entering higher education and academia. The Emergency Committee in Aid of Displaced Foreign Scholars noted that there was an increase in antisemitism among native academics who feared that their jobs were being put at risk by the acceptance of foreign educators.²⁶ In 1920, Ivy

²² Voegelin, *Autobiographical Reflections*, 72, Kindle.

²³ Box 3, Folder 19, Eric Voegelin Papers, Hoover Institution Library & Archives, Stanford, CA.; Voegelin, *Autobiographical Reflections*, 72, Kindle.

²⁴ Marjorie Lamberti, "The Reception of Refugee Scholars from Nazi Germany in America: Philanthropy and Social Change in Higher Education." *Jewish Social Studies* 12, no. 3 (2006): 157–92, (here 159), accessed: 11/10/2020, <http://www.jstor.org/stable/4467750>.

²⁵ Lamberti, "The Reception of Refugee Scholars from Nazi Germany in America: Philanthropy and Social Change in Higher Education." 159.

²⁶ Lamberti, "The Reception of Refugee Scholars from Nazi Germany in America: Philanthropy and Social Change in Higher Education", 158-159.

League schools placed a high ceiling on Jewish students and academics on grounds of Jewish stereotypes of aggression, ambition, and individualism.²⁷

American based foundations like the Rockefeller Foundation and the Emergency Committee in Aid of Displaced Foreign Scholars became defenders for many of these academics. Through these foundations, many German and Austrian academics gained access to the United States and other countries. The foundations also awarded fellowships to highly valued scholars and gave grants for the scientists of the Kaiser Wilhelm Society.²⁸ While their main goal was to find jobs and placement for fleeing refugees, the Emergency Committee saw this as an opportunity to shape public youth perception about Jewish scholars in America, as the added representation lessened antisemitic prejudices in universities.²⁹ Voegelin also benefited from a Rockefeller fellowship in his travels to America between 1924 to 1927, working in American and French universities.³⁰

In the Hoover Institution Archives, I managed to find a letter regarding Voegelin's escape to the US and the high barrier requirements that were put in place. On May 23, 1938, Professor Josef Hupka, former Dean of the Law Faculty at the University of Vienna, wrote on behalf of Voegelin as an academic and faculty member.³¹ While the letter is addressed to "To Whom It May Concern", and not anyone in particular, it does paint a picture of the high-standard academic talent that the US was looking to import.

²⁷ Lamberti, "The Reception of Refugee Scholars from Nazi Germany in America: Philanthropy and Social Change in Higher Education", 159-160.

²⁸ Lamberti, "The Reception of Refugee Scholars from Nazi Germany in America: Philanthropy and Social Change in Higher Education", 161.

²⁹ Lamberti, "The Reception of Refugee Scholars from Nazi Germany in America: Philanthropy and Social Change in Higher Education", 164.

³⁰ Box 1 Folder 1 Eric Voegelin Papers, Hoover Institution Library & Archives, Stanford, CA.; See also, Voegelin, *Autobiographical Reflections*, 56, 62, 66, Kindle.

³¹ Box 1 Folder 1 Eric Voegelin Papers, Hoover Institution Library & Archives, Stanford, CA.

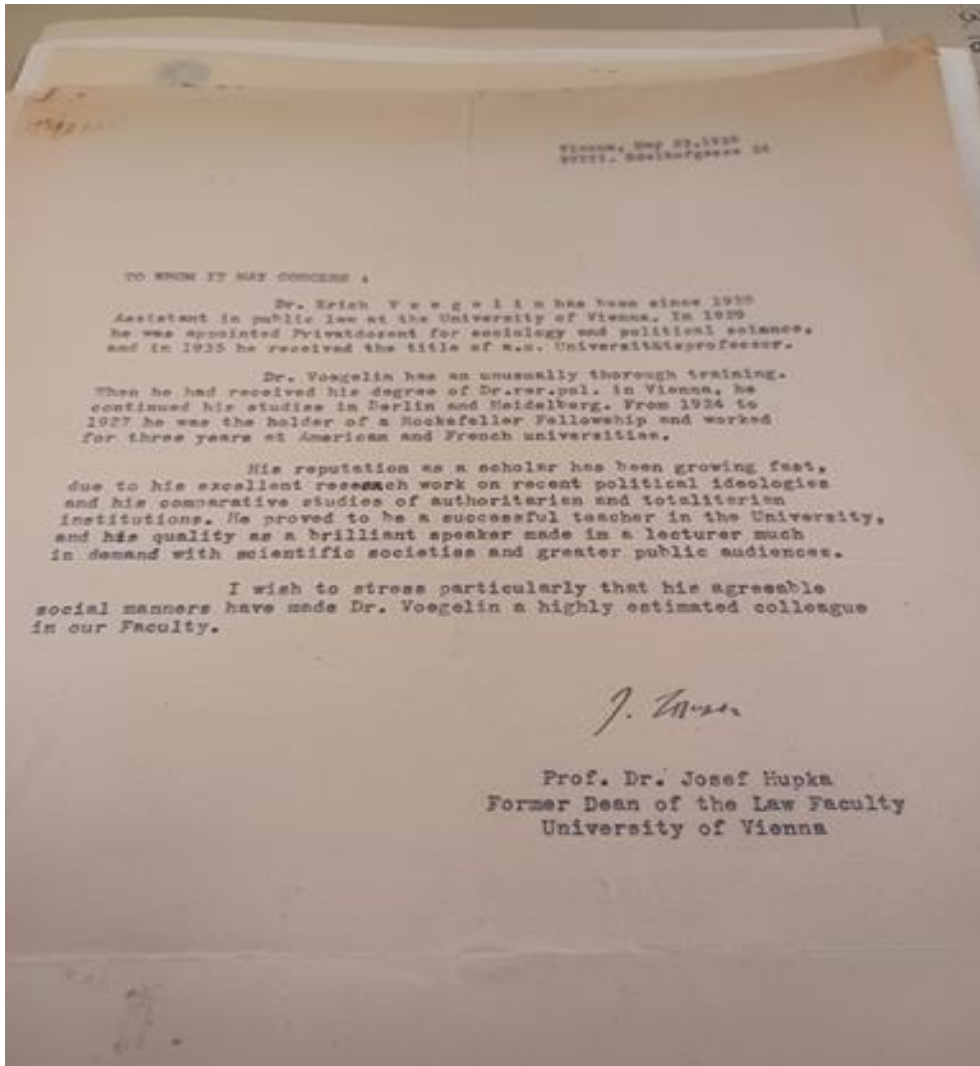


Figure 2 Professor Josef Hupka's Letter

A letter from Professor Josef Hupka concerning Voegelin. Source: Box 1 Folder 1 Eric Voegelin papers, Hoover Institution Library & Archives, Stanford, CA.

In 1928, Voegelin was Assistant Professor of Public Law at the university before being appointed *Privatdozent* of sociology and political science in 1929.³² He received the title of University Professor (*Universitätsprofessor*) in 1935, having served previously as an assistant

³² Back then, the field of political science was not a separate distinct field of knowledge, as it was associated as a field within law, with Voegelin having to gain a law doctorate in order to practice political science. It is also worth noting that Voegelin uses the terms “political science” and “law” interchangeably when describing this period of his life in his autobiography and, as shown above, Voegelin may not have been the only person to do so during this time. See, Voegelin, *Autobiographical Reflections*, 32, 67, Kindle.; See also, Voegelin, *Modernity Without Restraint*, 2.

professor for constitutional and administrative law under Hans Kelsen and Adolf Merkl.³³ His work in the comparative studies of totalitarian and authoritarian societies and political ideologies was a major reason for the growth of his reputation.³⁴ While the letter may not have been addressed to anyone in particular, given the circumstances between April 1938 and May 1938 with the *Anschluss*, it may be reasonable to believe that this letter was to help Voegelin secure his position at Harvard University and his overall escape from Nazism. Voegelin faced issues with registration in the 1940s. As Voegelin himself wrote in letters addressed to the Department of Justice's Alien Registration Division on February 19, 1942, he was classified as an "enemy alien" by the government as he registered as an Austrian in 1940.³⁵ The Attorney General and the Alien Registration Division cleared the "enemy alien" designation later on February 23, 1942, according to a letter written by Voegelin on April 2, 1943.³⁶

Fortunately, Holcombe's letter arrived in time for Voegelin to make the trip to the US and accept the position at Harvard as a part-time instructor and he arrived in America on September 15, 1938, according to a letter he wrote to Dr. Wendell H. Stephenson at LSU in 1942.³⁷ This opportunity was a temporary assignment which was supposed to last a year. Immediately, Voegelin looked towards other job opportunities and sent his application across the country. Bennington College was the first to make him an offer for a spring semester term in 1939 as an assistant professor, but Voegelin did not like the strong Left-Wing atmosphere of this Eastern college, seeing it as a similar dilemma to what he had left behind in Austria with National Socialism. Furthermore, Voegelin wanted to get used to American living, which was

³³ Voegelin, *Autobiographical Reflections*, 67, Kindle.

³⁴ Box 1 Folder 1 Eric Voegelin Papers, Hoover Institution Library & Archives, Stanford, CA.

³⁵ Box 1 Folder 1 Eric Voegelin Papers, Hoover Institution Library & Archives, Stanford, CA.

³⁶ Box 1 Folder 1 Eric Voegelin Papers, Hoover Institution Library & Archives, Stanford, CA.

³⁷ Box 1, Folder 1, Eric Voegelin Papers, Hoover Institution Library & Archives, Stanford, CA.; This is also confirmed by Voegelin himself. See Voegelin, *Autobiographical Reflections*, 72, Kindle.

not feasible thanks to the large influx of immigrant refugees in the East coast.³⁸ He accepted an opportunity at the University of Alabama as an Assistant Professor under chairman Roscoe Martin, teaching American Government, the Constitution, and Public Administration for two and half years. His pay of \$2,500 for the year was half that of Bennington's offer. Despite the general situational context of the time, Voegelin recounts that he was received warmly by the American South, many of whom enjoyed the prospect of being protectors of a foreign European refugee.³⁹ During this time, Voegelin gave a course in the history of political ideas, joined the Southern Political Science Association and was introduced to Dr. Robert J. Harris, then the Chairman of the Political Science department at Louisiana State University, who brought Voegelin to LSU as an associate professor in 1942 with an increased salary.⁴⁰ In total, according to Voegelin, he taught American Government and political matters at both LSU and the University of Alabama for twenty years, mastered the English language, gave courses in the history of political ideas, the American Constitution, diplomatic history, and comparative government, and published his seminal work *The History of Political Ideas*.⁴¹

Throughout the 1940s, Voegelin grappled with the problem of the history of ideas. He was impressed with the issue while at Harvard as he observed George H. Sabine's *History of Political Theory*. Voegelin's overall issue with the history of ideas as it was conceived at that time was that it was not expansive enough.⁴² Voegelin wanted to delve deeper into the origins of political ideas, not to be stuck with the conventional Greek to contemporary models that were the

³⁸ Voegelin, *Autobiographical Reflections*, 83-84, Kindle.

³⁹ Voegelin, *Autobiographical Reflections*, 85, Kindle.

⁴⁰ Voegelin, *Autobiographical Reflections*, 85, Kindle.

⁴¹ Voegelin, *Autobiographical Reflections*, 85-87, 89, Kindle.; Voegelin, *Modernity Without Restraint*, 1-3.; See Also, Ellis Sandoz, *The Voegelinian Revolution: A Biographical Introduction* (Baton Rouge, LA: Louisiana State University, 1981), 76-77.

⁴² Voegelin, *Autobiographical Reflections*, 89, Kindle.

standard treatment. He found that one cannot properly talk about the politics of the Middle Ages without having a firm understanding of Christianity, and that firm understanding of Christianity cannot be achieved without an understanding of Judaism. This is where his intellectual perspective evolved beyond his earlier works on political religions, and where he began to draft *History of Political Ideas*. From there, Voegelin began to study Hebrew under a local Alabama based Rabbi. He also observed the advancing field of Ancient Near Eastern studies as practiced by the University of Chicago's Oriental Institute.⁴³ He even went as far as studying Classical Chinese philosophers, such as Confucius and Lao-Tse, Chinese history, teach Chinese government, and learn Chinese when Chinese studies became popular in his department.⁴⁴

In 1951, Voegelin gave a series of “Walgreen lectures” at the University of Chicago which forced him to bring his ideas to the forefront of American political philosophical discourse. During this time, Voegelin began to make a further inspection of the gnostic movements within the Christian church during the early Middle Ages.⁴⁵ These gnostic movements broke from the traditional teachings of the church and began to develop their own gnostic gospels like the Gospel of Thomas and the Gospel of Truth, whilst claiming that salvation can only be gained and known through their teachings. They also taught that there were two gods in the Bible, the Old Testament God who was evil and cruel and the New Testament God who was loving and kind, rejecting the God of the Old Testament as being a lesser god called the Demiurge.⁴⁶ These lectures, fueled by his drive to create his own tome on the history of political ideas, which was still in manuscript form at the time, led to the publishing of *The*

⁴³ Voegelin, *Autobiographical Reflections*, 89, Kindle.

⁴⁴ Voegelin, *Autobiographical Reflections*, 89, Kindle.

⁴⁵ Voegelin, *Autobiographical Reflections*, 91-92, Kindle.

⁴⁶ Jason G. Duesing and Nathan A. Finn, *Historical Theology For The Church* (Nashville, TN: B&H Academic, 2021), 26, 33-35, 72-73, 90-91, 99-100, Kindle.; Andrew Williard Jones, *The Two Cities: A History of Christian Politics* (Steubenville, OH, Emmaus Road Publishing, 2021), 72-73.

New Science of Politics in 1952, which debated his new conception on Modern Gnosticism.⁴⁷

Voegelin stayed at LSU in the Department of Government as one of their first three Boyd professors until 1958, with three volumes of his famous *Order and History* series finished.⁴⁸

In 1958, Voegelin returned to Germany and accepted a position as the first professor to teach political science at the University of Munich since the death of Max Weber in 1920.⁴⁹ (Assuming the position of one of his biggest intellectual influences).⁵⁰ By this point, as attested in his autobiography and in *Science, Politics, and Gnosticism*, his thesis of modern Gnosticism was more refined. In his inaugural lecture at the university, he split the intellectual public of Germany. He introduced the method by which gnostic movements controlled and dominated their believers, which was published in *Science, Politics, and Gnosticism*.⁵¹ As mentioned before, Voegelin held his famous lecture series on Hitler and the Nazis at the University of Munich later published in *Hitler and the Germans*. He returned to America for the final time, accepting a position in the Hoover Institution as a senior scholar where he wrote the last of his works, including *Autobiographical Reflections* and the final volumes of his *History of Political Ideas*.

Going beyond Voegelin's life, his intellectual works inspired a variety of thinkers of both the 20th and 21st century. Ellis Sandoz, who first trained under Voegelin as an undergraduate at LSU, became a distinguished scholar in the field of political theory under Voegelin, and began the Eric Voegelin Institute at LSU as the general editor of the *Collected Works of Eric Voegelin*, and the author of *The Voegelinian Revolution: A Biographical Reflection*, which serves

⁴⁷ Voegelin, *Modernity Without Restraint*, 2.; Voegelin, *Autobiographical Reflections*, 91-93, Kindle.

⁴⁸ Voegelin, *Autobiographical Reflections*, 16, Kindle.

⁴⁹ Voegelin, *Modernity Without Restraint*, 3.

⁵⁰ Voegelin, *Autobiographical Reflections*, 39-40, 73-74, Kindle.

⁵¹ Voegelin, *Modernity Without Restraint*, 252-253; Voegelin, *Autobiographical Reflections*, 93, Kindle.

alongside *Autobiographical Reflections* as a detailed biography on Voegelin's life and intellectual career in English.⁵²

⁵² Sandoz was the graduate advisor to David N. Whitney, author of *Maladies of Modernity: Scientism and the Deformation of Political Order*, and my Professor of Political Science at Nicholls State University. See, David N Whitney, *Maladies of Modernity: Scientism and the Deformation of Political Order* (South Bend, IN: Saint Augustine's Press, 2019). See Also, Voegelin, *Autobiographical Reflections*, 17, 203, Kindle.; Sandoz, *The Voegelinian Revolution*.

The Importance of Voegelin's Outlook and Thesis

It is here where Voegelin's overall intellectual outlook must be addressed. Even in his early years as a student and academic in the German-Austrian space, Voegelin can best be described as a thoroughly educated intellectual maverick scholar. He never explicitly upheld or defended any one ideology, creed, or religion outside of the moral and ethical tenets which he had learned from the writings of Max Weber, namely the ethic of intellectual honesty. For Voegelin, the proper scholar in the social sciences must never cease to be a student in a variety of differing fields of knowledge while also not holding a firm ideological belief, such as Hegelianism or neo-Kantianism.⁵³ He shared with Ludwig Von Mises who had once taught Voegelin economics in a private seminar at the University of Vienna alongside F.A. Hayek, a general scene to learn and study all that can be gleaned for the progression of one's thought.⁵⁴ He studied both modern intellectual thinkers, from Karl Marx, John Dewey, Othmar Spann, G.W.F. Hegel, and Immanuel Kant, as well as classical and Christian thinkers like Plato, Aristotle, Plotinus, Augustine, and Thomas Aquinas.⁵⁵

Because of his strong disdain for rigid ideology, due to his lengthy critique of various different ideologies, Voegelin has been labelled by his critics and partisans alike as a Platonist, a Hegelian, a Protestant, a Catholic, a Jew, an old/new Liberal, a neo-Augustinian, a Thomist, and (most interestingly considering his life and career), a National Socialist, a Communist, and a Fascist.⁵⁶ While it may appear humorous that a person who fled Austria specifically because of Nazism would himself be a Nazi, much less be both a Nazi, Communist, and a Jew, the wide

⁵³ Voegelin, *Autobiographical Reflections*, 39-40, 73-74, Kindle.

⁵⁴ Voegelin, *Autobiographical Reflections*, 33-35, Kindle. See also, Ludwig Von Mises, *The Mises Reader Unabridged*, ed. Shawn Ritenour (Auburn, AL: Mises Institute, 2016), 23-24, Kindle.

⁵⁵ Voegelin once considered himself a Marxist upon reading *Das Kapital* in the summer during his first ever semester of university studies in 1919, but after learning more about economic theory and history, he rejected it. Voegelin, *Autobiographical Reflections*, 33-35, 38, 56-57, 67, 75-76, 80, Kindle.

⁵⁶ Voegelin, *Autobiographical Reflections*, 74, Kindle.

depth of ideological labels thrown unto Voegelin is a testament to his own intellectual standards of not having a particular ideological slant in one's research as a social scientist. His hatred of ideologies stemmed not from his supposed allegiance to any one or more ideologies, but from the rigid dogma and intellectual trickery of certain ideological movements as well as the calls for murder and religious obedience found within these ideologies (specifically Nazism).⁵⁷ As Voegelin himself writes in *Autobiographical Reflections*:

Ideologies, whether positivist, or Marxist, or National Socialist, indulge in constructions that are intellectually not tenable. That raises the question of why people who otherwise are not quite stupid, and who have the secondary virtues of being quite honest in their daily affairs, indulge in intellectual dishonesty as soon as they touch science. That ideology is a phenomenon of intellectual dishonesty is beyond a doubt, because the various ideologies after all have been submitted to criticism, and anybody who is willing to read the literature knows that they are not tenable, and why.⁵⁸

His disdain for such trickery is evident throughout many of his writings and lectures and foremostly in *Science, Politics, and Gnosticism*. In his inaugural lecture in Munich, Voegelin firmly critiqued each of the ideological thinkers as Gnostics, men who wanted to assume the role of God and shape the world to their prescribed way of thought whilst staunchly rejecting opposing ideas and classical philosophy and Christian theology.⁵⁹ This is what he terms as “the prohibition of questioning” in which one is not permitted to ask essential questions about first causes, the etiology of mankind, and the validity of the ideology in practice.⁶⁰

⁵⁷ Voegelin, *Autobiographical Reflections*, 74, Kindle.; See also, Voegelin, *Modernity Without Restraint*, 262-267.

⁵⁸ Voegelin, *Autobiographical Reflections*, 73, Kindle.

⁵⁹ Voegelin, *Modernity Without Restraint*, 261-277.

⁶⁰ Voegelin, *Modernity Without Restraint*, 261-265.

Karl Marx, for example, asserts in his book, *Economic, Philosophic, Manuscripts of 1844*, that man is born out of nature and nature is born out of man (the Marxist doctrine of dialectical materialism). Marx asserts that any questioning of the origins of the first cause in this infinite chain is meaningless. As Marx writes:

You will reply, however: I grant you this circular movement; now grant me the progression which drives me ever further until I ask: Who begot the first man, and nature as a whole? I can only answer you: Your question is itself a product of abstraction. Ask yourself how you arrived at that question. Ask yourself whether your question is not posed from a standpoint to which I cannot reply, because it is a perverse one. Now I say to you: Give up your abstraction and you will also give up your question. Or if you want to hold on to your abstraction, then be consistent, and if you think of man and nature as non-existent, then think of yourself as non-existent, for you too are surely nature and man. Don't think, don't ask me, for as soon as you think and ask, your abstraction from the existence of nature and man has no meaning.⁶¹

Voegelin notes this very instance as a key example of the prohibition of questioning in *Science, Politics, and Gnosticism*, thus is why Voegelin openly refers to Marx as an intellectual swindler.⁶² Marx does not want you to think about the ultimate events or beings that caused the infinite chain of progression to exist. He simply wants you to assert his proposition as such and trust that this infinite chain of human progression will eventually arrive at Communist utopia that Marx advocates for. In Marx's eyes, the socialist man sees the entire history of the world as

⁶¹ Karl Marx, *Economic and Philosophic Manuscripts of 1844*, Translated by Martin Milligan (First Start Publishing, 2012), 113-114, Kindle.

⁶² Voegelin, *Modernity Without Restraint*, 262-265.

nothing but the begetting of man through human labor, which is begotten from nature. There is no need for God or any sort of first cause, for man is the cause of himself.⁶³ If one was aware of Aristotle's etiological argument of man, as Voegelin reasons, then Marx's intellectual swindle may not catch him unawares, just as a firm knowledge of Plotinus and the neo-Platonic mysticism would dispel one from the intellectual swindle of Hegelianism.⁶⁴

Voegelin's interpretation of these sorts of ideologies as Gnostic, stems from the idea that of a secular rebellion against the notion of God and metaphysics in favor of a self-deifying belief that uplifts the greatest aspects and powers of God, omnipotence, omniscience, and omnibenevolence, upon mankind and break us free from the restrictions of reality through the sheer unexhausted belief in the self through our hidden powers.⁶⁵ In *The Political Religions*, Voegelin exposes this very same notion under the idea of myth. As Voegelin writes:

The naïve apocalypse is replaced by a conscious apocalypse; the system claiming to be rational-theoretical, national-economic, or sociological is replaced by 'myth'. The 'myth' is created purposely to bind the masses emotionally and to arouse in them the politically effective expectation of salvation. Since the myth cannot legitimize itself through transcendent revelation or stand up to scientific criticism, a new concept of truth is developed in the second phase – a concept, [...] of the so-called organic truth.⁶⁶

This sort of analysis is one of the defining aspects of his criticism of politically religious/Gnostic ideologies like Nazism, Marxism, and Positivism in both his early and later

⁶³ Marx, *Economic and Philosophic Manuscripts of 1844*, 114.

⁶⁴ Voegelin, *Autobiographical Reflections*, 75-76, Kindle.

⁶⁵ Voegelin, *Modernity Without Restraint*, 253-255.

⁶⁶ Voegelin, *Modernity Without Restraint*, 62.

works. It is present within his early writings on Nazism being a political religion, and it is essential understanding for anyone looking to dive deep into Voegelin's writings, thoughts, and analysis. Ideologies like Nazism and Marxism draw a picture of reality in which one can believe without thought. A faith/trust that is meant to be unshakable in the same manner as an honest Muslim's, Christian's, or Jew's faith in their respective Gods is meant to be upheld. To Adolf Hitler, the Aryan man is blessed with the superior Nordic blood of his ancestors, and thus, he controls the fate of humanity. His ability to create and sustain art, science, and culture, untainted by inferior blood, is the means which one can escape the horrors and degradation of the Jew, and create an ever-lasting utopia, it is the will of human evolution, the will of mother nature, and the will of Aryan blood.⁶⁷

Voegelin, in both *The Political Religions* and *Autobiographical Reflections* credits the success of Nazism to the decline of the Western intellectual space.⁶⁸ He believed that it was the continued degradation of intellectualism within Western academia that resulted in well-studied academics not seeing the clear holes within the ideologies they ascribe to as well as to regard the fundamental questions and philosophy of the classical and Christian era as intellectual taboo. Rather than Nazism being a "relapse into the Dark Ages", it was an inevitable conclusion to the already present issue of the withering western secular mind, which deemed the assertions that would have been laughed out of court in the Medieval and Classical Ages to be intellectually viable.⁶⁹ The success of intellectually dishonest ideologies like Hegelianism and Marxism led academia down to a state in which completely flawed ideologies like Nazism can also succeed, thanks to the lack of academic self-awareness and its insistence that the questions of first causes

⁶⁷ Adolf Hitler, *Mein Kampf*, translated by Ralph Manheim, Introduction by Abraham Foxman (New York: NY, Houghton Mifflin Company, 1999), 284-292, Kindle.

⁶⁸ Voegelin, *Modernity Without Restraint*, 24.; Voegelin, *Autobiographical Reflections*, 77-78, Kindle

⁶⁹ Voegelin, *Modernity Without Restraint*, 24-25.; Voegelin, *Autobiographical Reflections*, 75-78, Kindle.

and the etiology of man that filled classical and Christian thought were not worth serious contemplation.⁷⁰

In essence, the importance of Voegelin's interpretations of political religion and Modern Gnosticism are the same. Both are attempts to explore the philosophical problems and foundations of dogmatic ideologies like Nazism and understand why they attract and command such a strong obedience from their believers, even as the ideological premises are grounded in dishonesty and command the murder of the opposition/out-group. As Voegelin wrote:

The interpretation is not all wrong, but I would no longer use the term religions because it is too vague and already deforms the real problem of experiences by mixing them with the further problem of dogma or doctrine. Moreover, in *Die Politischen Religionen* I still pooled together such phenomena as the spiritual movement of Ikhnaton, the medieval theories of spiritual and temporal power, apocalypses, the Leviathan of Hobbes, and certain National Socialist symbolisms. A more adequate treatment would have required far-reaching differentiations between these various phenomena.⁷¹

No totalitarian society can come into being without a compelling ideology for the people to believe in, a unifying element which encapsulates the audience in a state of unquestionable obedience towards the state, as well as the demonization of a particular out-group, whose ultimate removal from society is necessary for the eventual salvation of the believer. The question as to what makes such ideologies compelling is the essence of Voegelin's thesis. The study of political religions is a study on the deeper philosophical aspects of intellectual

⁷⁰ Voegelin, *Autobiographical Reflections*, 77, Kindle.

⁷¹ Voegelin, *Autobiographical Reflections*, 78-79, Kindle.

movements and totalitarian societies which operate on the basis that the state rules as the highest authority, either directly under, aside of, or in the place of God/the gods. It is more than a study of totalitarianism with regards to government administrative policies or death squads, as none of these things would ever exist if the populace did not find cause for it.⁷² It takes into consideration the people involved, the average man who is turned into a Reinhard Heydrich, a Josef Goebbels, or an Adolf Hitler. It earns its place as a subject worthy of study both as a proper primer to Voegelin's overall intellectual mind, his analytical approach towards ideologies like Nazism, as well as an understanding of the how the state-endorsed ideology supplants traditional and religions conceptualizations of society.

⁷² Of course, this is not to say that government's enforcing of tyrannical laws is not a cause or factor in the compliance of the populace.

A History of Political Religion

Philippe Burrin discussed the academic relevance of the term in his journal article titled, “Political Religion: The Relevance of a Concept.” The history of the term “political religion” dates back to the French Revolution, according to Burrin, when German writer and poet Christoph Martin Wieland was describing the indoctrination tactics of the revolutionary armies in 1793.⁷³ The description pertained to the level of devotion that was required of the masses within the society, a sense of certainty that cannot be breached.

In relation to the rise of dictatorships like the Soviet Union, Nazi Germany, and Fascist Italy, many within academia began to take up the term as a conceptualization of the feelings and experiences of people within these societies. French sociologist Raymond Aron, Austrian historian Lucie Varga, and German theologian Hans-Joachim Schoeps often used the term to describe Nazism, but the term remained rather undefined until Eric Voegelin published his *Die Politischen Religionen* in 1938.⁷⁴

As Burrin notes, Voegelin traces the origins of modern political religions to the end of the Middle Ages, with the breakdown of Christian-centered communities that emphasized the divine to more earthly communities which emphasized devotion to national sovereignty and the goal of obtaining unlimited knowledge through science. Nazi, Communist, and Fascist communities tended to reject the ultimate divine authority of God and used a series of symbolic tools from a Christian culture in the way they conceived of order. These elements are a familiar style of hierarchy, a similar narrative of the moral struggle between good and evil, as well as a well-trusted political class that is held as a more secular *ecclesia*, with Communist, National Socialist,

⁷³ Burrin, “Political Religion: The Relevance of a Concept.” *History and Memory* 9, no. 1/2 (1997), 321–49, (Here 322), accessed Nov. 7, 2022, <http://www.jstor.org/stable/25681009>.

⁷⁴ Burrin, “Political Religion: The Relevance of a Concept”, 322-323.

and Fascist societies being prime examples.⁷⁵ 40 years afterward, the term was used in political sociological studies by Jean-Pierre Sironneau who, like Voegelin, argued that ideologies like Communism and Nazism observed elements of traditional religion through the sacralization of their political beliefs, from ritualistic behavior, mythical structures hidden behind political rhetoric, and the use of political affirmation.⁷⁶

In his book, *The Third Reich: A New History*, historian Michael Burleigh directly affirms Voegelin's thesis on Nazism being a political religion at various points.⁷⁷ In fact, Burleigh not only leans on Voegelin but also the aforementioned Philippe Burrin, Raymond Aron, and Robert Pois, utilizing various academic sources like Theodore Abel's *Why Hitler Came to Power* and Leonard Schapiro's essay "The Importance of Law in the Study of Politics and History."⁷⁸

Burleigh also notes that Nazism is the easiest to understand as "pseudo-liturgical rites or deliberate evocations of the Bible for rhetorical purposes."⁷⁹ A clear example of this is that the Nazis used the authority of science to ground their claims of race and blood as being something akin to the divinely held gospel. One cannot question the validity of Aryan racial superiority as it is sanctified by the make-believe facts of their racial science.⁸⁰ Furthermore, Nazism rejected Jewish elements of Christianity, as well as the classical philosophical and metaphysical tradition of Christian theology, to supplant a refreshed Nazified version of Christianity. This was used to manipulate the masses into idolizing Nazi beliefs instead of maintaining Christian doctrine.

⁷⁵ Burrin, "Political Religion: The Relevance of a Concept", 323.

⁷⁶ Burrin, "Political Religion: The Relevance of a Concept", 324.

⁷⁷ Michael Burleigh, *The Third Reich: A New History* (London: Pan Books, 2001), 10, 252-257, 718-720.

⁷⁸ Burleigh, *The Third Reich*, 927-928.

⁷⁹ Burleigh, *The Third Reich*, 11.

⁸⁰ Burleigh, *The Third Reich*, 253-254.

Christian teachings of compassion and humility were stripped away as being alien to their beliefs in racial nationalism, egoism, and the use of violence.⁸¹

Emilio Gentile and George Staunton argued in favor of Voegelin's thesis on political religion in a journal article titled, "The Leviathan as a Church: Totalitarianism and Political Religion."⁸² In the lengthy article, Gentile and Staunton discuss the nature of various ideologies like Nazism, Communism, and Fascism, the definition and implementation of totalitarianism, and how academics like Eric Voegelin, Louis Rougier, and Rudolf Rocker interpreted totalitarian ideologies like Nazism and Communism. They use an assortment of scholars from various fields who address this field, such as renowned historian Carlton J. H. Hayes, political scientist Sigmund Neumann, the aforementioned Political Scientist Raymond Aron, and the anti-capitalist Christian theologian Paul Tillich.⁸³ With regard to Voegelin, they argue that the concept of political religion ought to be thought of as a political community in which there is a "mutual permeation between religion and politics in movements."⁸⁴ This conception requires a broader outlook on religion to denote not simply a church-oriented set of practices but the sacralization of political elements within society. This took shape in various forms from the classical period to modernity. An example relating to this thesis was the sacralization of Aryan blood within Nazi society.⁸⁵

Richard J. Evans, a renowned historian who is a Professor of Modern History at Cambridge, objects to Voegelin's idea of political religion as well as the notion of Nazism being

⁸¹ Burleigh, *The Third Reich*, 255.

⁸² Gentile, and Staunton, "THE LEVIATHAN AS A CHURCH [sic]: Totalitarianism and Political Religion," *In Politics as Religion*, (2006) 45–67 accessed: 10/25/2022, <https://doi.org/10.2307/j.ctv14163w3.7>.

⁸³ Gentile, and Staunton, "THE LEVIATHAN AS A CHURCH: Totalitarianism and Political Religion," 51, 53, 55-57, 66.

⁸⁴ Gentile, and Staunton, "THE LEVIATHAN AS A CHURCH: Totalitarianism and Political Religion," 56-57.

⁸⁵ Gentile, and Staunton, "THE LEVIATHAN AS A CHURCH: Totalitarianism and Political Religion," 56.

an anti-Christian movement in the short article “Nazism, Christianity and Political Religion: A Debate.”⁸⁶ One of his arguments against the concept’s application towards Nazism is the lack of Christian uproar against the clear persecution of the Jews, which prominent Christian clerics like Clemens August Count von Galen and Pope Pius XII withheld their objections to their treatment.⁸⁷ Another argument is that the Nazis, Hitler in particular, saw Nazism in the present, not as an ideological explanation of the future, akin to Christian overtures of rapture and the second coming. Nazism was not concerned with the deeper aspects of the afterlife or metaphysical conceptualizations of reality, as mentioned before. This realization destroys the argument of Nazism being a political religion as it does not entail a greater spiritual experience or advance a more religious outlook of reality.⁸⁸

In an article titled, “Rethinking Nazism and Religion: How Anti-Christian Were the ‘Pagans’?”, historian Richard Steigmann-Gall states that Nazism’s general approach to Christianity and religion is not geared specifically towards the same hostility, but in the manner that subsists in “Positive Christianity”. The Nazis’ approach to religion was not hostility, but assimilation, as many Nazis, even the anti-Christians Alfred Rosenberg and Heinrich Himmler held Protestant Christian understandings within their worldviews.⁸⁹ Taking from fellow scholars Jost Hermand and Michael Kater, as well as speeches and documents from Nazi officials like Heinrich Himmler and those who influenced them like Ernest Renan, Steigmann-Gall notes that the Nazis presented themselves as allies of the Christian faith against the secularism of Weimer

⁸⁶ Richard J. Evans, “Nazism, Christianity and Political Religion: A Debate”, *Journal of Contemporary History* Vol 42, no. 1, (2007): 5–7, accessed: 09/05/2022, <http://www.jstor.org/stable/30036424>.

⁸⁷ Evans, “Nazism, Christianity and Political Religion: A Debate”, 5-6.

⁸⁸ Evans, “Nazism, Christianity and Political Religion: A Debate”, 6.

⁸⁹ Richard Steigmann-Gall, “Rethinking Nazism and Religion: How Anti-Christian Were the ‘Pagans’?” *Central European History* Vol 36, no. 1 (2003): 75–105, (here 76, 103) accessed: 09/05/2022, <http://www.jstor.org/stable/4547272>.

Germany and the atheism of Soviet Communism. They utilized Protestant Christian fervor to greater political appeal until they were able to reform the traditional aspects of Protestant Christianity into a Nazified form, as opposed to completely replacing Christianity with some other, Nazi-approved, religious outlook.⁹⁰

⁹⁰ Steigmann-Gall, "Rethinking Nazism and Religion: How Anti-Christian Were the 'Pagans'?", 95, 98.

Is Nazism A Political Religion?

In the beginning of *Die Politischen Religionen*, Voegelin describes the ancient Egyptian Cult of Ra during the separation of the Old Kingdom and the New Kingdom in the 12th dynasty. This period saw the priests of other Egyptian gods beginning to associate their gods with Ra to gain more cultural and political influence. This resulted in Ra's growing influence and political significance as being old. This was one of the oldest examples of political religion.⁹¹ During these events, the political power of Egypt went from the old capital of Memphis to Thebes, where the less-than-influential god, Amon, became Amon-Ra, and all of the local gods were unified into forms of the one sun god.⁹² Afterward, the head of the state temple in Thebes, the high priest of Amon, became more influential than his rivals in Heliopolis and Memphis, becoming the god of the state.⁹³ This example gives us a perspective of how a political religion works. In conceiving the term as it relates to the state, Voegelin writes:

Supremacy is simply asserted to be part of a judgment based on experience that claims to be correct. The order of creation, which is excluded completely, is, as it were, decapitated by it, i.e., the divine head is cut off, and the state takes the place of the world-transcendent God as the ultimate condition and the origin of its own existence. [...] If the state is absolute power, then it cannot have any internal barriers.⁹⁴

In essence, political religion refers to the process of the state operating as the sole or highest authority of the populace, beyond that of any transcendent metaphysical entity like the Christian God or in collaboration with such entities as the authority of their will. The concept of political religion as it relates to Nazism, Communism, and Fascism was a reality in which the

⁹¹ Voegelin, *Modernity Without Restraint*, 34-36.

⁹² Voegelin, *Modernity Without Restraint*, 35.

⁹³ Voegelin, *Modernity Without Restraint*, 36.

⁹⁴ Voegelin, *Modernity Without Restraint*, 28-29.

collective society upheld the state as the absolute authority in line with God as being the divine head of existence. The usage of symbols, culture, and rhetoric are used by the state to affirm a sense of certainty and righteous indignation within the followers of the ideology as the state uplifts itself as the new divine organization. The term can then mean the replacement of the traditional religious conception of society with the state's approved anthropology/state of human nature, complete with rituals, symbols, and language (state-organized propaganda) designed to denote the state as the true authority, the religion of the populace.

As noted in the introduction, the use of the term religion in this context remains too vague. What separates the reality of religion from the reality of a strongly held belief? A working definition of religion comes from religious studies scholar, Christian Smith, who writes:

Religion is a complex of culturally prescribed practices, based on premises about the existence and nature of superhuman powers, whether personal or impersonal, which seek to help practitioners gain access to and communicate or align themselves with these powers, in hopes of realizing human goods and avoiding things bad.⁹⁵

In his definition of religion, Smith breaks down the subject of religion into why humans practice religion and abide by supernatural entities with superhuman powers. This is because religious people believe these entities to have authority and power that humanity cannot perceive through regular means, i.e. sensory perception.⁹⁶ For instance, the Christian God is able to create and infinitely sustain all causal existence itself and give his only son Jesus Christ as a sacrifice to

⁹⁵ Christian Smith, *Religion: What It Is, How It Works, and Why It Matters* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2017), 22, Kindle.

⁹⁶ It is worth noting that Smith has a critical realist perspective on religion, meaning that his concerns are detailing the casual mechanics of what religion is, how it works, and why it works for us as human beings. It is very much a taxonomical approach to religion that will not only avoids any vagueness surrounding the term "religion" but also provide us with a clear template to judge the validity of the political religion as an idea. See, Smith, *Religion*, 7, Kindle.

purge the deeply rooted sinfulness of humanity is a power that is meant to be a cause for worship among Christians as it displays a power that is not obtainable through human means of technology or will but only through Christ alone.⁹⁷ In this, the Christian God exercises his authority through his actions and displays his dependability via his sacrifice, and Christians have cultural identity in themselves being objectively valuable to God. Religious belief grounds itself in the notion that these supernatural abilities are available to humankind via the supernatural/metaphysical entities that are noted for being the sovereign authorities, i.e., god/gods. These attributes of these supernatural sovereign authorities are necessary for the functioning of religious belief.⁹⁸

In contrast, political religions do not call men to adhere to a superior authority that may overrule the state. The state takes the place of the divine as either the ultimate representative of divine authority or as the ultimate authority itself. Man-made ideologies like Nazism and Communism compel their adherents to derive meaning and purpose by following the state-endorsed ideology. Political religion, in effect, works opposite of divine revelation, whereas divine revelation tells humanity to look outward, to reflect on supernatural and metaphysical realities, political religions tell humanity to seek inward to the state and material reality. Voegelin makes this clear when discussing the nature of man-made utopia in the inner-worldly political religions:

⁹⁷ It should not be mistaken that this interpretation of Christian doctrine is merely my own, as this has been standard doctrine throughout Christian history. Duesing and Finn, *Historical Theology For The Church*, 27-29, 33-34, 43-44, Kindle.; St. Augustine, *On Christian Doctrine: Theological Treatise on the Teachings of Scriptures*, Translated by Marcus Dods (2021), 54, Kindle.; Thomas C. Oden, *Classic Christianity: A Systematic Theology* (New York, NY: HarperCollins Publishers, 2009), 20, 38, 62, 105-106, Kindle.; Jones, *The Two Cities: A History of Christianity*, 76-78.

⁹⁸ Smith, *Religion*, 136, Kindle.

Man can let the contents of the world grow to such an extent that the world and God disappear behind them, but they cannot annul the human condition itself. This remains alive in each individual soul; and when God disappears behind the world, the contents of the world will become the new gods; when the symbols of transcendent religiosity are banned, new symbols develop from the inner-worldly language of science to take their place. Like the Christian ecclesia, the inner-worldly community has its apocalypse, too; [...] The end realm is no longer a transcendent community of the spirit but an earthy condition of perfected humanity.⁹⁹

In conceptualizing Voegelin's detailing of political religion in light of Christian Smith's definition of religion, political religion removes the divine authority of God, and as such, removes the philosophical, metaphysical, and theological implications of classical religion in order for the state to act as the arbiter of the culturally prescribed practices complex with the exalted leader as the head authority of society. When discussing the manner, Michael Burleigh writes:

Neither Hitler nor Mussolini dispensed entirely with God as a source of ultimate validation for his political mission. However, political religions were emphatically 'this worldly', partly to distinguish them from a supposedly obsolescent Christianity, whose values they sought to replace, whatever their tactical accommodations with the churches. [...] Rather, they caricatured fundamental patterns of religious belief, in modern societies where sacralised collectivities, such as class, nation, or race, had already partly supplanted God as objects of mass enthusiasm or veneration.¹⁰⁰

⁹⁹ Voegelin, *Modernity Without Restraint*, 60.

¹⁰⁰ Burleigh, *The Third Reich*, 10.

An example of the Nazis' using their tactical accommodations with the church comes from the uplifting of positive Christianity, which was pushed under the supervision of the Nazi government through the Reich Bishop, Ludwig Müller. The German Christian statement of principles affirmed a belief in Christ in line with their race, protection against those considered to be unfit or inferior, as well as an outright rejection of Jews and Judaism for the sake of their race and blood.¹⁰¹ Hitler's personal worldview (aside from Aryan supremacy), however, was anything but a rigid mix of Christianity and Nazism, but rather, a blend of materialism, "faux-Nietzschean" contempt (as Burleigh notes), Christian values, and anti-clericalism.¹⁰² Another example comes from Voegelin's lectures on Nazism, in which he notes that Hitler planned to build a grand observatory and planetarium in Linz that will act as a religious temple that, in Hitler's own words, "thousands of excursionists will make a pilgrimage there every Sunday".¹⁰³

On the surface, it seems that my argument falls into the objection laid out by Evans and Steigmann-Gall, that Nazism is not a political religion for the virtue of tolerating and using religion, not removing or rejecting it outright. As Steigmann-Gall notes, even Heinrich Himmler gave orders to SS officers regarding the Nazi outlook on Jesus Christ, urging that the SS respects the person of Jesus Christ as a member of the German Volkish history and that any insults against Jesus or accusations of him being a Jew are not to be tolerated.¹⁰⁴

Evans argues that instead of Nazism being a radical secular supplanting of the Christian faith in Germany, the Nazi party was mostly ambivalent towards Protestantism and general

¹⁰¹ Burleigh, *The Third Reich*, 720.

¹⁰² Burleigh, *The Third Reich*, 718.; For a more in-depth read on the subject of Friedrich Nietzsche's philosophy and its possible influence on Nazism and Hitler, See Stephen R.C. Hick's *Nietzsche and the Nazis: A Personal View* (Ockham's Razor Publishing, 2010), Kindle.

¹⁰³ Eric Voegelin, *The Collected Works of Eric Voegelin: Hitler and the Germans*, ed. Detlev Clemens and Brandan Purcell, Vol. 31 (Columbia, MO: University of Missouri Press, 1999), 125.

¹⁰⁴ Steinmann-Gall, "Rethinking Nazism and Religion: How Anti-Christian Were the 'Pagans'?" 76-77.

Christianity (This argument comes from Richard Steigmann-Gall's *The Holy Reich: Nazi Conceptions of Christianity*).¹⁰⁵ The evidence for this is that the Nazi party intended for their Nazified Christianity to supersede the neo-Paganism of other Nazis like the SS leader Heinrich Himmler, and allowed many German Nazi members to remain members of the Christian Church (presumably as long as it was under their revision of Christianity).¹⁰⁶

There is one important thing to note about Voegelin's idea of political religion. Voegelin conceptualizes political religion as not only the deletion of or open hostility between the state and religion. But as the Egyptian examples before given indicate, political religions can utilize religious elements to uplift the state. Voegelin denotes the differences between older political religions like the Cult of Ra and modern ones like Nazism. One is accepting of an outer-worldly theological and religious understanding of reality (trans-worldly), while the other remains more secular and grounded in an inner-worldly experience (inner-worldly). In both categories, the state is uplifted from the use of symbols, rituals, and other means to display itself as a higher authority.

Even if we grant the argument that Nazism was not overly or intentionally hostile towards Christianity, the central claim of Nazism being a political religion according to Voegelin's conception still remains. Nazis' intent to uphold the state as being the sole authority of the populace in a similar manner to the Egyptian political religions, using the divine to justify their superior sovereignty over the individual. Nazism clearly upholds and idolizes the physical aspects of the world (race, blood, and German soil), uses religious imagery and symbolism with

¹⁰⁵ Evans, "Nazism, Christianity and Political Religion: A Debate", 6-7.

¹⁰⁶ Evans, "Nazism, Christianity and Political Religion: A Debate", 6.

its theological revisionism of Christianity, and inscribes cultural practices upon the populace without having to affirm divine sovereignty.

In some cases, outright hostility between the Nazi state and the Christian church was deemed acceptable by the Nazis, as Gilmer W. Blackburn notes in the journal article called “The Portrayal of Christianity in the History Textbooks of Nazi Germany”. On September 22, 1941, a meeting took place between a Nazi official and the Reich Main Security Office, which detailed a plan to destroy all confessional churches under charges of committing crimes against the nation within German-controlled land after the war. Hitler planned to destroy the Christian churches.¹⁰⁷ Blackburn also notes from several of Hitler’s secret conversations that Hitler held a firm distaste for Christianity. While having dinner with close associates on July 11, 1941, Hitler declared, “The heaviest blow that ever struck humanity, was the coming of Christianity”.¹⁰⁸

This was not the only direct statement of Hitler’s animosity towards religion, as he stated during a religious controversy in 1933, (a controversy likely relating to the failure of the Reich Church as discussed later on), that: “The time will come when I'll settle my accounts with them [the clergy], and I'll go straight to the point. [...] I shan't let myself be hampered by judicial scruples. [...] In less than ten years from now things will have quite another look.”¹⁰⁹ He made a similar statement on December 19, 1941, vowing to his guess that war, “I shall consider that my life's final task will be to solve the religious problem”.¹¹⁰ Even Martin Bormann, the Nazi Party’s

¹⁰⁷ Gilmer W. Blackburn, “The Portrayal of Christianity in the History Textbooks of Nazi Germany.” *Church History* 49, no. 4 (1980): 433-445, accessed: 09/05/2022. <https://doi.org/10.2307/3164817>.; The term “confessional church” refers to the groups of churches that rose to protest the Nazis’ attempts to establish a unified church under Positive Christianity. These churches were led by a coalition of Protestant pastors called the Pastor’s Emergency League, which sought to differentiate themselves from Nazi churches. See, Thomas Childers, *The Third Reich: A History of Nazi Germany* (New York, NY: Simon and Schuster, 2017), 327.

¹⁰⁸ Blackburn, “The Portrayal of Christianity in the History Textbooks of Nazi Germany,” 434.

¹⁰⁹ Blackburn, “The Portrayal of Christianity in the History Textbooks of Nazi Germany,” 434.

¹¹⁰ Blackburn, “The Portrayal of Christianity in the History Textbooks of Nazi Germany,” 434.

secretary and close associate to Hitler's, often commented on the incompatibility of Christianity and Nazism. Referring to Christian churches as being "based on human ignorance" while Nazism, "must always be guided by the most recent data of scientific researches".¹¹¹

Kurt G. W. Ludecke, a close personal friend of Hitler's, recounted in his book, *I Knew Hitler* that Hitler planned to eventually destroy Christian Confession churches in Germany after dealing with the elimination of the Jewish people.¹¹² Theologian Karl Barth noted that the inherent link between Christianity and Judaism demanded the removal of Christianity from German society as it is, at its core, alien to Nazi thought Himmler gave voice to this theory also.¹¹³ Hitler sought the destruction of Christian thought through the educational system. Depicting Christianity as mythology and advancing such understandings down to the higher level of education, the Nazis sought to revise the history between Germany and Christianity in an anti-Christian light. One of the textbooks detailing this anti-Christian history was *So Ward Das Reich* which was published in 1943.¹¹⁴ Blackburn's argument regarding the Nazism approach to Christianity falls perfectly in line with political religion theory in regards to Nazism, as a replacement and eventual destroyer of the traditional religion of society, echoing back to Voegelin's quote regarding the removal of the transcendent to the inner-worldly.

In his book, *The Third Reich: A History of Nazi Germany*, Thomas Childers notes several instances of Hitler Youth groups assaulting and harassing Catholic clergy and members, with Joseph Goebbels launching a propaganda campaign against the Catholic Church. Hitler even remarked that Christianity will soon fade away thanks to the advances of science and that

¹¹¹ Payne, *A History of Fascism 1914-1945*, 200, Kindle.

¹¹² Payne, *A History of Fascism 1914-1945*, 434, 436, Kindle.

¹¹³ Payne, *A History of Fascism 1914-1945*, 435, Kindle.

¹¹⁴ Payne, *A History of Fascism 1914-1945*, 436-437, Kindle.

Christian doctrine will be convicted as an absurdity.¹¹⁵ Likewise, there were instances of Christian Protestants and Catholics denouncing Nazism openly, with the aforementioned Bishop Clemens August Count von Galen being one of them, even standing in protest of the Nazis' genocidal euthanasia program against the disabled.¹¹⁶ In 1930, the Catholic church banned Catholics from joining the Nazi party and forbade any Catholics within the Nazi party from participating in church rites, holy sacraments, and funerals. Four thousand out of Germany's seventeen thousand Protestant ministers openly rejected Nazism and formally revolted in 1934 to form an independent Confessional Church.¹¹⁷

If we are to conceive of political religion as the state being held as the supreme authority of society, either through the removal of religion outright or by the utilization of religion to uplift the state as a divine or near-divine authority. The Nazi state still fits as an example of the state being held to the maximum authority, able to prescribe a complex of cultural practices that are acceptable only by the state as the highest authority. In contrast, the Japanese Imperial state after the Meiji Restoration in 1868, in which the Japanese Emperor was held as a divine godlike person among the Japanese who were taught to revere him beyond all things is a modern example of a trans-worldly political religion.¹¹⁸

On the other hand, Italian Fascism is an example of an inner-worldly political religion as shown through the philosophy of actualism. Actualism was founded by one of the founding philosophers of Italian Fascism, Giovanni Gentile. It demands one's absolute obedience to the

¹¹⁵ It is noteworthy to point out that Hitler's interpretation of Christian doctrine, according to Voegelin, was not at all well-informed in terms of theology, but rather fundamentalist and misconceived. See, Eric Voegelin, *Hitler and the Germans*, 124-125.

¹¹⁶ Burleigh, *The Third Reich*, 719, 723.; Childers, *The Third Reich*, 324.

¹¹⁷ Payne, *A History of Fascism 1914-1945*, 199-201, Kindle.; Childers, *The Third Reich*, 122-123, 324-325.

¹¹⁸ Iris Chang, *The Rape of Nanking: The Forgotten Holocaust of World War II* (New York, NY: Basic Books, 1997). 20-23, 31, Kindle.

state as the perfect existing society of the people. Actualism directly denies the existence of God, as well as any notions of individualism and natural rights as we don't exist as individuals.¹¹⁹ One is not a mere man within society, but a part of social collective consciousness in the state, which is governed by the national syndicate, with Il Duce as the single representative of the people.¹²⁰ Giovanni Gentile expresses this belief in one of the founding documents of Italian Fascism, *Origins and Doctrines of Fascism*:

Liberty is found only in the State and the State is authority. The State is not an abstraction, an entity that descends from heaven and remains suspended in air above the heads of citizens. [...] The authority of the State is not subject to negotiation, or compromise, or to divide its terrain with other moral or religious principles that might interfere in consciousness. The authority of the State has force and is true authority if, within consciousness, it is entirely unconditioned.¹²¹

To Gentile, all institutions of authority from the church to the family must be subordinate to the state. Nothing is above the state, everyone is below the state. This is different from Imperial Japan, in which the state justifies its authority as a representative of the divine. Nations like Imperial Japan and Ancient Egypt held divine outlooks on their leadership, seeing their rulers as gods or direct representatives of gods, and thus classifying them as trans-worldly political religions. If we were to define political religion solely in this manner, ideologies like Nazism and Italian Fascism do not fit as clearly. This is why Voegelin classifies them as inner-worldly political religions and not trans-worldly. Inner-worldly religions place total authority

¹¹⁹ James A. Gregor, *Giovanni Gentile: Philosopher of Fascism* (New York, NY: Routledge, 2017), 24-25, Kindle.

¹²⁰ Gregor, *Giovanni Gentile*, 29-31, Kindle.

¹²¹ Giovanni Gentile, *Origins and Doctrine of Fascism: With Selections From Other Works*, ed. A. James Gregor (New York, NY: Routledge, 2017), 30-31, Kindle.

within a more secular lens and both Nazism and Italian Fascism operate as clear examples. In Voegelin's own words:

On the other hand, they [Italian Fascism and Nazism] reject the political determination of will by the people – again especially in the German theory, where the Führer is the only carrier of the people's will. In the teaching of the plebiscite, the idea that act of voting is an act of national will is decisively rejected. The plebiscite is to express and enforce the concordance between the objective will of the people embodied in the Führer and the subjective convictions of the people. The plebiscite is a declaration of loyalty to the Führer not an announcement of an individual's will.¹²²

It is not solely the elimination of traditional religion that makes an inner-worldly religion, but the displacement of ultimate authority from god/gods to the state as well as the elimination of the individual as apart from the state. The state is God, God speaks through the state, if not by a literal scene, then by the symbolic. Dealing with this subject of inner-worldly and trans-worldly political religions, Emilio Gentile and George Staunton write:

Hence, in order 'to understand political religions properly,' it was necessary [to] 'broaden the concept of religiousness' to include not only 'religions of salvation but also all those phenomena during the development of the state, that we could think of as religious.' This is why Voegelin distinguished between 'ultramundane religions' and 'intramundane religions,' and the latter category included all movements, even those that were atheist and hostile to religion, that nevertheless displayed 'religious experiences underlying their

¹²² Voegelin, *Modernity Without Restraint*, 66.

behavior, that worshipped as sacred something different from the religions against which they fought.’ Thus, Voegelin not only broadened the traditional concept of the religious, but also adopted the term ‘political religion’ extensively to define various forms of the sacralization of power, the state, and politics, from the classical world to modern times.¹²³

While positive Christianity does not insist that Hitler is a divine figure, that he is emblematic of a trans-worldly political religion, the elements of an inner-worldly religion in Nazism are there. According to Nazi ideology, the Aryan man is seen as the best and brightest hope for humanity as his genetically superior genes and culture give him the capabilities to craft a utopian ethnostate called *Volkgemeinschaft*, that will become the Nazi empire with the *Führer* being the sole absolute leader and embodiment of the populace’s ultimate will.¹²⁴ Nowhere, at least in Nazi philosophy, is this clearer than in Hitler’s *Mein Kampf*:

We see this most distinctly in connection with the race which has been and is the bearer of human cultural development - the Aryans. As soon as Fate leads them toward special conditions, their latent abilities begin to develop in a more and more rapid sequence and to mold themselves into tangible forms. The cultures which they found in such cases are nearly always decisively determined by the existing soil, the given climate, and - the subjected people. This last item, to be sure, is almost the most decisive. The more primitive the technical foundations for a cultural activity, the more necessary is the presence of human helpers who, organizationally assembled and employed, must replace the force of the machine. Without this possibility of using lower human beings, the Aryan would never have been able to

¹²³ Gentile, and Staunton, “THE LEVIATHAN AS A CHURCH: Totalitarianism and Political Religion,” 56.

¹²⁴ Hitler, *Mein Kampf*, 290-292, Kindle.; Bendersky, *A Concise History of Nazi Germany*, 28-32, 115-121; Childers, *The Third Reich*, 73.

take his first steps toward his future culture; just as without the help of various suitable beasts which he knew how to tame, he would not have arrived at a technology which is now gradually permitting him to do without these beasts.¹²⁵

The sacralization of Aryan blood, the Nazi state, and the *Führer's* place as the ultimate representation of the earthly will of the people, the elements of the inner-worldly religious symbolism and authority of the state are made clear. This is why, in Hitler's eyes, those of inferior blood, the African, the Slavic, the mixed, and especially the Jew, cannot be allowed to mix with Aryans. The racialized socialism of the Nazis in the 1930s, from the denial of Jewish citizenship, interracial marriage between Jews and Aryans, the closing or "Aryanization" of Jewish owned businesses and firms, the banning of Jews from being lawyers, dentists, and pharmacist as well as the political riots and acts of intimidation on the part of the SA and SS like *Kristallnacht*, were all meant to drive Jews out of Germany to keep them from using the resources and mixing with the sacred blood that Nazis needed to create the *Volksgemeinschaft*.¹²⁶ *Lebensraum*, a geopolitical concept created by Dr. Karl Haushofer, meaning living space, was meant to provide the Aryan people with enough space to foster the *Volksgemeinschaft* and unlock the potential of their Aryan blood, keeping this land away from the Slavs, Jews, and Gypsies.¹²⁷ In light of Voegelin's interpretation of political religion, those of inferior blood to the Nazis are "symbols of Satan", whereas Aryan Germanic blood is "the chosen people".¹²⁸

In regards to the religious nature of totalitarianism, working with the interpretation of Waldemar Gurian, who developed his own typological conception of political religion

¹²⁵ Hitler, *Mein Kampf*, 294, Kindle.

¹²⁶ Childers, *The Third Reich*, 351-356, 361, 364-367.

¹²⁷ Childers, *The Third Reich*, 41, 96, 369-370.

¹²⁸ Voegelin, *Modernity Without Restraint*, 61.

independent from Voegelin, it is noted that totalitarian ideologies operate in a different manner to that of monarchic absolutist societies, in that, the totalism of the ideology demands complete uniformity and is intolerant of passive reluctance.¹²⁹ The totalitarian state uses political religion both as a means to justify the authority of the state as absolute and to control public opinion in a manner that entails positive enthusiasm from the populace.¹³⁰ In both Voegelin's and Gurian's conceptions of political religion, however, the state is always being elevated as the supreme authority.

In light of Gurian's interpretation of political religion, in which the state does not simply assert its authority over the populace but inhibits a genuine emotional commitment from the populace in light of its authority, Nazism still applies. The use of positive Christianity and the uplifting of Aryan blood and German Aryan culture through the lenses of Aryan nationalism were designed to compel genuine loyalty within the populace. This is clearly seen through the Nazi experiment with the establishment of the Reich Church under the theological precepts of positive Christianity. In 1933, Hitler appointed Ludwig Müller as head bishop of the Reich Church with the goal of creating a unified Protestant church. Had this plan succeeded pastors would have to swear oaths of loyalty to Hitler and the Nazi state.¹³¹ These efforts failed once the pastors realized the theological inconsistencies with positive Christianity and the uplifting of the state.¹³² As Thomas Childers writes:

Among the clauses of that law was the introduction of the Aryan paragraph of the Civil Service Law into the Church. Alarmed at the law and the direction of the new church,

¹²⁹ Gentile, and Staunton, "THE LEVIATHAN AS A CHURCH: Totalitarianism and Political Religion," 56-57.

¹³⁰ Gentile, and Staunton, "THE LEVIATHAN AS A CHURCH: Totalitarianism and Political Religion," 56.

¹³¹ Childers, *The Third Reich*, 327.

¹³² Childers, *The Third Reich*, 327.

many pastors refused to take the oath. They also explicitly rejected the incorporation of the Aryan Paragraph into Church affairs. . . . Especially disturbing to them was the Reich Church's racial orientation, which, in their view, made race the key element of the new Nazified theology. These pastors, under Martin Niemoller's leadership, began to organize in regional groups around the country to express their disaffection.¹³³

If one wished to argue that Nazism was not a political religion on the grounds that it was mostly ambivalent to Christian belief, then why did Hitler seek to compel the loyalty of the Christian church to this extent? And why did Hitler go on to plan the eventual destruction of confessional churches, whose disagreements with Nazism laid on theological grounds? It is clear that the Nazis were antisemitic and rejected all notions of Jewish influence within Christian theology. This is especially true regarding Jesus' heritage, the Old Testament, and several other Jewish aspects of Christianity, all of which Nazis rejected in their own revision of Christianity. Through positive Christianity, the ultimate authority moves from God alone to the state alone. The state does not share in its power with God, but the religious imagery acts as a justification for the state's authority. As Ludwig Von Mises wrote in his famous introductory treatise on economics, *Human Action*:

People frequently call socialism a religion. It is indeed the religion of self-deification.

The state and government of which the planners speak, the people of the nationalists, the society of the marxians and the humanity of the positivists are names for the God of the new religions. But all these idols are merely aliases for the individual reformer's own will. In ascribing to God, the inflated Ego glorifies itself. It is infinitely good,

¹³³ Childers, *The Third Reich*, 327.

omnipotent, omnipresent, omniscient, eternal. It is the only perfect being in this imperfect world.¹³⁴

To the Nazis, the National Socialist state is not simply a state under the authority of God. It does not rule at God's side, nor does it justify its authority as being an intermediary or overseer of God's divine will. The National Socialist state is God, the sole sovereign of Germany that is tasked to bring the Aryan people to the ultimate salvation of the thousand-year *Volksgemeinschaft*, rescuing them from the tyranny and intermixing of inferior blood. In this, Nazism shows the clear self-deification of the Aryan, the state, and their *Führer*, which is why Voegelin claimed that Nazism was a political religion.

¹³⁴ Ludwig Von Mises, *Human Action: A Treatise on Economics* (Mansfield Centre, CT: Martino Publishing, 2012), 689.

Conclusion

In conclusion, Eric Voegelin's interpretation of political religion in regards to Nazism is still applicable. Under the critical realist approach to religion, the concept of inner-worldly political religion accurately describes and details the nature of Nazism as a state-endorsed secular ideology that replaces traditional religion whilst elevating the state as the highest sovereign authority that all those within society must adhere to. In both Eric Voegelin's and Waldemar Gurian's interpretations of political religion, Nazism demands the complete compliance of the populace, the total uplifting of the state, and the removal of any actual conceivable authority that posed a threat to the National Socialist ideological justification of power.¹³⁵ In light of the trans-worldly political religion model, Nazism does not utilize the claims of divine authority in the manner necessary to denote itself as a divinely inspired or led sovereign like Imperial Japan or Ancient Egypt. But in the inner-worldly model, there is a clear uplifting of Aryan blood, the authority of the state, the authority of science, and the use of positive Christianity both as a means of justifying the Nazi ideology, and designation of a utopian outcome for the followers of Nazism in the complete fulfillment of the *Volksgemeinschaft*, akin to the salvation religious traditions of Christianity, Judaism, and Islam.

Nazism also prescribes a series of underlined cultural practices that are required of its followers, chiefly among them giving absolute obedience to the *Führer*. One ought to think of the *Führer* as the hero of the populace, a bringer of the great Aryan utopia of the *Volksgemeinschaft*, which will bring Germany to a new long-lasting empire. (In like manner to how Christ is viewed among Christians, the bringer of the final kingdom of God which will eliminate all sin and last for all time.) In the sense of Nazi anthropology, whereas an observant of

¹³⁵ Gentile, and Staunton, "THE LEVIATHAN AS A CHURCH: Totalitarianism and Political Religion," 56-57.

a traditional religion defines oneself by his relationship to God/gods, the Nazi party member
observant defines oneself as a member of the collective body of the Aryan race, represented only
by the sheer will and might of the *Führer*.

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