

# Christopher Dawson and Political Religion

Joseph T. Stuart  
*University of Mary*

*When religion was expelled from their souls, the effect was not to create a vacuum or a state of apathy; it was promptly, if but momentarily, replaced by a host of new loyalties and secular ideals that not only filled the void but (to begin with) fired the popular imagination.*

—Alexis de Tocqueville on the French Revolution (1856)<sup>1</sup>

World politics shifted dramatically around the time of the Great War. A. J. P. Taylor opened his book *English History: 1914–1945* with these words: “Until August 1914 a sensible, law-abiding Englishman could pass through life and hardly notice the existence of the state, beyond the post office and the policeman.”<sup>2</sup> English people did not need passports to travel abroad; they paid modest taxes. The state largely left the adult citizen alone. During and soon after the Great War, this minimal relationship between citizens and their states changed. Government took on a larger scope of activity in Britain, creating new departments of shipping, labor, food, national service, and food production. Some people understood that this was a direct result of the war.<sup>3</sup> Drafts forced citizens to serve the state; new regulations appeared for food, the press, and beer; and even the clocks changed with the first implementation of Daylight Savings Time.<sup>4</sup>

After the Great War, the politicization of life increased rapidly. In America and Britain the welfare state grew out of the New Deal (1933–1936) and the Beveridge Report (1942). On the Eurasian continent the changes were more dramatic. The collapse of the

German, Ottoman, Austro-Hungarian, and Russian empires after the Great War left a power vacuum in which totalitarian political movements were born. Dictatorship arose in Turkey, and communism spread to China in 1921 and took over that country in 1949. All of these movements embraced social planning and an expanded role for the state.

Christopher Dawson (1889–1970), the British historian of culture and social thinker, called these developments the “expansion of Politics.”<sup>5</sup> Critical observers of the time struggled to develop concepts describing this expansion of politics. Were Russia after 1917, Italy after 1922, and Germany after 1933 dictatorships? Tyrannies? Autocracies? These regimes were perceived as something new that traditional vocabulary could not adequately describe. New concepts were needed because these regimes sought to control human lives in unprecedented ways. Two major new concepts that arose in the 1920s and 1930s to compare modern despotisms were “totalitarianism” and “political religion.”<sup>6</sup> Dawson employed these concepts and they have been used by scholars ever since to try to understand the historical significance of the political movements of the early twentieth century.

The term “totalitarian” originated in 1923 among Italian anti-fascist opposition, including liberals, Catholics, and socialists.<sup>7</sup> It was adopted by fascists themselves. Benito Mussolini described totalitarianism as the all-embracing state: “The Fascist conception of the state is all embracing; outside of it no human or spiritual values can exist, much less have value. Thus understood, Fascism is totalitarian, and the Fascist state—a synthesis and a unit inclusive of all values—interprets, develops, and potentiates the whole life of a people.”<sup>8</sup> The concept of political religion describes Mussolini’s idea that the state is the source of all spiritual values. Political religion is a description of the functional place of an all-embracing political ideology that sacralizes entities such as nation, state, race, or class. Even though fascism, Nazism, and communism presented themselves as secular, advocates of the concept of political religion argue that they *functioned* as religions. The totalitarian regimes were animated by political religions, the spirits behind the

totalitarian machinery.<sup>9</sup> In addition to the phrase “political religions,” Dawson used “pseudo-religion[s],” “public religions,” and “secular religions”<sup>10</sup> almost synonymously. While Dawson’s views on totalitarianism have already been studied,<sup>11</sup> his use of the concept political religion has not.

Dawson explained the expansion of politics in terms of political religion because he thought it best made sense of both the peculiar mass appeal of the political ideologies and their sociological *function* as a common vision of a people shaping their view of reality, their values, and their very souls. In the context of Dawson’s work as a whole, then, political religion was an example of the dynamic historical relationship between religion and culture in a secular age. Dawson’s understanding of political religion has been substantiated by both modern scholarship and by evidence contemporary to the interwar years. Dawson’s contribution to this body of scholarship, as outlined below, is the manner in which he explained the roots of political religion against the background of human nature and modern history.

While Dawson’s writings of the 1930s were among the first sustained discussions of political religion in Britain, other European scholars studied it then as well, such as Franz Werfel (1890–1945), Eric Voegelin (1901–1985), and Raymond Aron (1905–1983).<sup>12</sup> After the Second World War, the concept faded from scholarly attention. However, since the fall of communism in western Eurasia by 1991 and the rise of fundamentalist terrorism in the early twenty-first century, the concept has returned today in the work of Michael Burleigh,<sup>13</sup> Emilio Gentile,<sup>14</sup> Hans Maier,<sup>15</sup> and the journal *Totalitarian Movements and Political Religions* (founded in 2000). Analysis of Dawson’s work contributes to this scholarship profound insight into the characteristics of political religion and its roots in the French Revolution, nineteenth-century industrial capitalism, the Great War, and what Dawson called the “spiritual vacuum” of modern European culture.

The use of the concept of political religion is often comparative, seeking to show that totalitarian movements in different countries have in common the “sacralisation of politics,” which occurs

when a state confers sacred status on an earthly entity such as nation or race.<sup>16</sup> Despite its limitations as a conceptual category and tendency to overemphasize religious-psychological aspects, Hans Maier argues that the term “political religion” is necessary to account for the psychological and sociological appeal of twentieth-century despotic regimes.<sup>17</sup>

In order to appreciate Dawson's thought on political religion, one must grasp something of his larger project as an historian. He sought to write a new kind of history different than the ecclesiastical history of the nineteenth century that studied the institutional church and its hierarchy, theology, morality, liturgy, and discipline.<sup>18</sup> He wanted to study religion not so much as an institution but as a cultural force. To do this he made use of the new disciplines of archaeology, anthropology, sociology, and comparative religion to investigate the role of religion in human culture and cultural change in world history. This he did in *The Age of the Gods* (1928) and *Progress and Religion* (1929). Here he examined ancient civilizations from the Indus River to Mesoamerica. He showed how the temple-complex served as the central nervous system of the Mesopotamian city-states, for example. While material factors also affected cultural development, Dawson argued that the rational and spiritual elements of culture determined the creativity and the progress of civilizations. Thus, religion had played a far more important role in world history than theorists had usually assigned to it.<sup>19</sup> The dynamic role that religion had historically played in cultural development was the bridge with which Dawson connected religious and secular history.

This historiographical project shaped Dawson's understanding of political developments after the Great War. It linked to the idea of political religion in a key passage from *Progress and Religion*: “Every living culture must possess some spiritual dynamic, which provides the energy necessary for that sustained social effort which is civilization. Normally this dynamic is supplied by a religion, but in exceptional circumstances the religious impulse may disguise itself under philosophical or political forms.”<sup>20</sup> Dawson was very perceptive to write this in 1929—before Hitler came to power,

though after Mussolini and Stalin had established themselves. *The religious impulse of human beings could disguise itself under political forms*; this was how Dawson connected his studies of ancient and medieval civilizations to his contemporary world. The religious impulse of humanity, which was so pervasive and powerful in human history, could appear hidden under political clothing, could take on political shapes, and even could deny religion in the name of atheism. This is a bold claim that requires close analysis.

### Roots of Political Religion

By the 1930s Dawson understood the expansion of politics not in terms of one particular ideology, as if Nazism was the real problem and communism the answer. Rather, he saw all of the major political movements of his day (communism, fascism, Nazism, socialism) as the result of deeper forces such as the mechanization of mass culture. Even democratic countries did not escape his prognosis; thus, he predicted in 1939 the rise of a “democratic totalitarianism which would make the same universal claims on the life of the individual as the totalitarian dictatorships of the Continent.”<sup>21</sup> One could not blame one ideology as the source of the problem over the others. One had to go behind all of these political developments to search for their common historical roots.

The roots of political religion have been traced by political scientists and historians back to the fourteenth-century BC Egyptian pharaoh Akhenaton,<sup>22</sup> who wielded state power as the sole political and religious representative of the god Aten, and to the sixteenth-century radical and Dominican friar Tommaso Campanella,<sup>23</sup> whose utopian *City of the Sun* greatly impressed Lenin. However, Dawson focused on the more immediate roots in modern history.

The first root reached back to the activities of the Jacobins in the French Revolution. As the political events of the 1930s grew more and more ominous, Dawson directed his scholarly attention toward the French Revolution. His *Gods of Revolution* was published posthumously in 1972, but much of it was written during the 1930s.<sup>24</sup> Sickness, severe depression, and restless moving from rented house to rented house prevented him from finishing the

book. Nevertheless, the book studied the underlying psychological and religious forces that gave the revolution such world-transforming power. Robespierre (1758–1794) was the ultimate representative of a universal religion of nature that would be a real national religion like the civic religions of the ancient world.<sup>25</sup> The new state cult, complete with civic festivals and churches, appropriated Christian ideas: “Like Christianity, it was a religion of human salvation, the salvation of the world by the power of man set free by Reason. The Cross has been replaced by the Tree of Liberty, the Grace of God by the Reason of Man, and Redemption by Revolution.”<sup>26</sup> In the name of those ideas, the Great Terror was unleashed on all who opposed them. Because the Jacobins struggled for something more than mere political goals, their movement took on global significance. As the French political thinker and historian Alexis de Tocqueville (1805–1859) had seen before Dawson,<sup>27</sup> the Jacobins created a powerful political religion.

Instead of finishing his book on the French Revolution in the late 1930s, Dawson turned to contemporary affairs and wrote *Beyond Politics* (1939). Here his studies of French eighteenth-century history proved useful:

Anyone who studies the history of the First French Republic in the light of recent political developments cannot fail to be impressed by the way in which the Jacobins anticipated practically all the characteristic features of the modern totalitarian regimes: the dictatorship of a party in the name of the community, the use of propaganda and appeals to mass emotion, as well as of violence and terrorism, the conception of revolutionary justice as a social weapon, the regulation of economic life in order to realize revolutionary ideals, and above all the attempt to enforce a uniform ideology on the whole people and the proscription and persecution of every other form of political thought.<sup>28</sup>

Dawson saw that the Jacobins sought to destroy the traditional distinction between church and state in the name of the

all-embracing politico-religious community.<sup>29</sup> That was the essence of the new totalitarian regimes of the early twentieth century. Contemporary scholars have corroborated Dawson's view of the French Revolution as the first root of twentieth-century political religion.<sup>30</sup> Russian revolutionaries, for example, distinctly recalled the French Revolution as an inspiration. Russian children were even named after Robespierre.<sup>31</sup> Though fascists were ambivalent toward the French Revolution and Nazis hated it, the Revolution nevertheless prepared the way for these later movements too by mobilizing the masses around ideological uniformity.<sup>32</sup>

The second major root of political religion in Dawson's thought was the spiritual vacuum that resulted by the late nineteenth century out of the spiritual anarchy and materialism of the age. His historical work on the nineteenth century is nowhere systematically presented. One has to glean it from articles, lectures,<sup>33</sup> and parts of books.<sup>34</sup> Perhaps this was because "[f]ew things are more difficult to understand than the mind of the immediate past."<sup>35</sup> However, he wrote one book focused exclusively on the nineteenth century: *The Spirit of the Oxford Movement* (1933). Here he argued that the Oxford Movement of John Keble, John Henry Newman, and others was the expression of an unique moment in English history (the 1830s) when the English mind was alive to adventure and to ideas. The movement protested against the spirit of the age, the utilitarianism and secularism of nineteenth-century liberalism, as well as the dominance of the English state over the Church of England, in the name of true spiritual freedom.<sup>36</sup>

The political religions, Dawson argued, were also reactions against the tendencies of the nineteenth century. They, too, reacted against the individualism and materialism that dominated especially the later nineteenth century when the tremendous economic developments resulting from liberal policies of free trade and free competition came to fruition. This created the "problem of wealth." It was an age of confidence, of progress, of exploitation, and of the ideal that government and church should get out of the way of trade and industry. In this way, material interests developed unchecked in an atmosphere of spiritual anarchy.<sup>37</sup> The secularization

of the age destroyed the religious unity and common moral values that were the basis of political and social life. A “spiritual vacuum” developed in which collective guilt, social idealism, and revolutionary movements could take root—such as nationalism and socialism, both firmly established in the nineteenth century. “The revolutionary attitude—and it is perhaps the characteristic religious attitude of Modern Europe—is in fact nothing but a symptom of the divorce between religion and social life.”<sup>38</sup> The political religions of the early twentieth century arose as an attempt to “find some substitute for the lost religious foundations of society and to replace the utilitarian individualism of the liberal-capitalist State by a new spiritual community.”<sup>39</sup> In this attempt to create new spiritual communities around ideological uniformity, the new states threatened the individual conscience and the Church. They claimed the whole of life, eroding the distinction between church and state in the interest of creating a secular church-state. In this way the political religions were a kind of anti-Oxford Movement, which had sought to renew the Church by more clearly distinguishing it *from* the state. The political religions wanted to collapse the two into one great Leviathan, transcending the distinction and reverting to ancient paganism when deity and ruler were one.<sup>40</sup>

The notion of a spiritual vacuum is important to understanding Dawson’s views on the political religions. The force of vacuums is determined by a pressure differential between the weight of the atmosphere and the low pressure inside the vacuum. The vacuum has no attractive force of its own—the force is supplied from the outside pushing particles into the vacuum. It is the weight of the external environment that pushes its way into the emptiness. By referring to a “spiritual” vacuum, Dawson implicitly holds that this is true of the soul as well. The vacant soul is like a vacuum: it is an empty place into which the weight of the surrounding spiritual atmosphere tries to push itself. The ideologies and prejudices and values of the time try to force entry. The spirits of the age enter the house if they find it unoccupied. If the soul remains empty, something will eventually breach the walls and take control of it. If “nature abhors a vacuum,” then the soul cannot remain empty and neutral—it must have a vision, a meaning to fill it.

Viktor Frankl (1905–1997), the Austrian psychiatrist and Holocaust survivor, wrote the best-selling book *Man's Search for Meaning* and picked up the idea of the spiritual vacuum—the “existential vacuum,” as he called it. He described the existential vacuum as a widespread phenomenon of the twentieth century. This vacuum is endemic to the human condition. It had been exacerbated by the loss of traditions in the modern world. Traditions had helped human beings make choices. They had helped them to know what ought to be done in life. Their influence had become weak, creating the existential vacuum. Those suffering in that vacuum experienced meaninglessness and boredom.<sup>41</sup>

During the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries intellectuals injected their influence into the volatile spiritual atmosphere of the age. Hegel and his followers justified the state as a manifestation of spiritual forces, and his “religion of the state” influenced everyone from fascists to communists.<sup>42</sup> In the case of fascism, Dawson blamed Nietzsche, George Sorell,<sup>43</sup> Marinetti,<sup>44</sup> and D’Annunzio<sup>45</sup> as the spiritual fathers of the movement. Their theoretical justification of violence and terrorism helped transform a national movement against defeatism into a totalitarian cult of the will to power.<sup>46</sup>

The political religions promised social salvation. In 1924 Mussolini commissioned new lyrics for the song “Giovinezza” (“Youth”), popularized by elite Italian soldiers in the Great War, as the fascist anthem. Singers caroled that they “swear faith to Mussolini” and “redeeming fascism.”<sup>47</sup> This appeal to the transformation of human beings was present even in socialism. In a 1932 lecture “Conservatism,” Dawson explained that the basis of the appeal of socialism was not so much political or economic as religious:

Socialism offers men not political order but social salvation; not responsible government but a deliverance from the sense of moral guilt that oppresses modern society: or rather, the shifting of that burden from society as a whole to some abstract power such as capitalism or finance or bourgeois civilization which is endowed with the attributes of

a powerful and malevolent spirit. Thus, Socialism is able to enlist all those religious emotions and impulses which no longer find an outlet through their old religious channels. The type of man who a century ago would have been a revivalist or even the founder of a new sect, today devotes himself to social and political propaganda. And this gives Socialism a spiritual power which the older political parties did not possess, though Liberalism, especially on the Continent, sometimes showed similar tendencies.<sup>48</sup>

Thus, socialism could appeal with great power to the spiritual vacuum created by secularization and the moral guilt associated with nineteenth-century capitalism.

The third root of political religion in Dawson's thought was the aftermath of the Great War, a war that has been called the "original sin" of the twentieth century.<sup>49</sup> While the war itself was to a "great extent the product of the forces of disintegration that were already breaking up the nineteenth-century order,"<sup>50</sup> there were two major results. First, the war ruined the international organization of world trade and world finance by reparation payments, war debts, inflation, tariff barriers, and unemployment. Looking back in 1935 he saw the war as "directly responsible for the economic crisis from which we are suffering today."<sup>51</sup> The economic crisis of 1929 led an increasing number of people to accept the necessity of a scientifically planned economy, as in Russia's Five Year Plan. It also fueled the final stage of Hitler's political rise. Furthermore, with the collapse of four empires, political stability was lost and the forces of disintegration greatly strengthened. Dawson pointed to the revival of terrorism, religious persecution, massacres of minorities, torture, and professional assassination.<sup>52</sup>

Second, Dawson argued that the "spiritual results" of the Great War were just as significant.<sup>53</sup> The phrase "spiritual results" is striking. It does not refer simply to the participation of French priests at the front, for example, or political sermons by bishops. That would be the view of the ecclesiastical historian who focuses on institutional religion. Rather, Dawson viewed religious forces as

those deep and powerful social currents that shape the worldviews and psychology of human beings. The religious needs of people could be expressed in collective social ideals of action and the sacralization of things or ideas, such as “nation” or “race.” Thus, there could be a “spiritual history” of the Great War.<sup>54</sup> Dawson thought that the conflict dealt a mortal blow to the liberal ideals of humanitarianism and optimism, while arousing dormant instincts to violence. “In a word it changed the spiritual atmosphere of Europe.” While communism and the ideal of social revolution had existed since Marx and Engels, “they acquired a new significance and power of appeal in the changed atmosphere and circumstances of the world after the War.”<sup>55</sup> The war helped create an environment in which political ideologies offering total explanations became appealing. They were suddenly new and exciting ideals calling for direct, collective human action.

Contemporaries understood this, too. As early as 1919, the economist John Maynard Keynes wrote of the situation in Russia, Austria, and Hungary where the misery and disintegration of life were rampant. The situations there showed how in the “final catastrophe the malady of the body passes over into malady of the mind. Economic privation proceeds by easy stages ... until the limit of human endurance is reached at last and counsels of despair and madness stir the sufferers from the lethargy which precedes the crisis.” This created a dangerous environment. “The power of ideas is sovereign, and [man] listens to whatever instruction of hope, illusion, or revenge is carried to him on the air.”<sup>56</sup> In writing this, Keynes outlined the conditions in which the political religions were even then arising.

Historians today have supported Dawson’s sense for the significance of the spiritual results of the Great War. In Germany, the war and hyperinflation set “hundreds of thousands of indigents in motion, as vagrancy became as epidemic as it would be in the US Depression,” Michael Burleigh explains. Some of these vagrants were wandering prophets, such as Ludwig Christian Haeusser (1881–1927), pandering to the mental confusion of the German people during the early 1920s. They often traveled barefoot, bearded, and long-haired, prophesying the end of the world and

pointing to the need for a new type of man to create a new society.<sup>57</sup> There was also growing interest in occultism, spread by figures such as Guido List (1848–1919), which formed the occult roots of Nazism.<sup>58</sup> The brutality of total war spilled over into violence against civilians in Germany and other parts of the continent. This “became a permanent condition, in the sense that political *opponents* were regarded as deadly *enemies*.”<sup>59</sup> All of these material and spiritual factors created an environment in which Hitler could rise by appealing to both the economic and political needs of the people as well as to their religious and messianic hopes.

In fact, the spiritual results of the Great War created the conditions in which Lenin, Mussolini, and Hitler could rise to power. Hans Maier writes about the devastations following 1917: the collapse of liberalism, the self-doubt, and the “longing for a new unity and completeness that prepared the ground for the great simplifiers.”<sup>60</sup> There is no doubt of the connection of the Great War to the rise of the dictators. Dawson wrote:

The age of the Great War was an age of iron, but it gave birth to no military genius and no great statesman; its political leaders were men of paper. The one man of iron that the age produced arose from the most unlikely quarter that it is possible to conceive—from among the fanatics and revolutionary agitators who wandered about the watering places of Switzerland and Germany conspiring ineffectually and arguing with one another.<sup>61</sup>

Lenin was able to travel from exile to Russia in 1917 and immediately take a leading role in the Bolshevik movement as a direct result of the Great War. This happened because after the United States declared war on Germany on April 6, 1917, it became imperative for the Germans to knock Russia out of the war. Consequently, the Germans, who clearly saw the power and importance of Lenin’s personality, sought to help the antiwar movement flourish in Russia by facilitating Lenin’s return across Europe and funding the Bolshevik party.<sup>62</sup>

Mussolini fought in the Great War and received severe wounds before his disillusion and break with socialism by 1919. His experience of trench warfare and the brotherhood of radicalized soldiers it produced led him to see this group as a powerful political force.<sup>63</sup> He recalls the marks of the war on his soul in his dictated autobiography: the suffering, the dead, the disillusion, and the betrayal. All of this gave him force and concentration after the war. He wanted to revive the Italian nation through a “wholly new political conception, adequate to the living reality of the twentieth century.” Thus, he helped found the fascist movement out of veteran, revolutionary, and nationalist groups as a heroic cohesive force that would stop the forces of dissolution.<sup>64</sup> Taking advantage of the political and economic chaos of the immediate postwar years, the movement was by 1922 already the most significant political force in the country.<sup>65</sup> Dawson was undoubtedly correct in his view that Benito Mussolini and the fascist movement reacted against the pessimism and defeatism so characteristic of the immediate postwar period in Italy owing to the disillusionment with the results of the war.<sup>66</sup>

Like Mussolini, Adolf Hitler was a veteran of the Great War. While recovering from severe wounds in a hospital in November of 1918, he learned of the end of the war. As he recorded in *Mein Kampf*, he fell into deep depression. Had everything been in vain? All the sacrifices and deaths, in vain? “I, for my part, decided to go into politics,” he wrote.<sup>67</sup> As in the case of Mussolini, the Great War was the authentic experience that connected him emotionally to millions of ordinary suffering people looking for new meaning.<sup>68</sup> Unlike in Britain where veterans never became a separate and violent political group because they were immediately integrated into the political system,<sup>69</sup> the Nazi Party grew out of discontented veterans and revolutionaries (as with fascism in Italy). Hitler joined in 1920. The party stressed German racial purity, the failure of democracy and laissez-faire capitalism, and the injustices forced on Germany as a result of the Great War. In this case, too, the war created the economic and spiritual conditions that brought Hitler to power.

When the first unabridged English translation of *Mein Kampf* appeared in 1939, Dawson's review appeared in *The Tablet*. He called it a "remarkably frank book." The value of the book to the English reader, Dawson thought, was that it revealed a hidden world alien from his traditions. "The chief cause of the mistakes that have been made during the last twenty years," he wrote, "is that we have concentrated our attention on one series of factors as though they were the whole of political reality and ignored the rest. And the success of National-Socialism is due to the way in which Hitler has mobilized and exploited these unseen factors [i.e., spiritual forces]." <sup>70</sup> Hitler understood the power of spiritual forces. But blinded by their focus on the surface of politics, Western politicians had made grave mistakes in their dealings with Hitler. Perhaps Dawson was thinking of Neville Chamberlain at Munich in 1938 where he signed the infamous agreement to hand over the Sudeten region to Germany in an effort to appease Hitler. Although Chamberlain was seen as a hero at the time, other politicians such as Winston Churchill shared Dawson's view of Nazism as a dangerous religious force. Churchill understood by 1935 how Hitler had exorcized the spirit of despair from Germany after the Great War and how he was building the "Totalitarian State" based on concentration camps and hatred of the Jews and Christians by "what [has] become the new religion of the German peoples, namely, the worship of Germany under the symbols of the old gods of Nordic paganism." <sup>71</sup>

Hitler knew how to harness hidden sub-political forces such as instinctive emotion in the interest of power. He did not ignore the spiritual factor in social life and could exploit it for his ends. To Dawson, the rise of Nazi power was both a religious and a political problem. In 1943 he wrote:

It is not possible to face the tremendous power drive of the new totalitarian parties by purely intellectual means, by argument and logic and philosophy, nor yet by ethical idealism, nor by a quietist withdrawal into the religious life, in the static sense. For Hitler, at any rate, is very conscious of the

spiritual factor in social life, he returns to it again and again in *Mein Kampf*. All his early propaganda is based on the importance of faith and the power of a few men with intense convictions to overcome all obstacles and all material difficulties. The weakness of Germany, he wrote, is not due to its lack of armaments, but its lack of arms is due to its spiritual weakness. And the secret of success was to be found not in material organisation, but in the recovery of spiritual power.<sup>72</sup>

Hitler realized implicitly that the liberal solution of privatizing the spiritual did not work. The separation of religion and culture was unsustainable. The people needed collective beliefs and he sought to arouse them to gain power. He (and others) wielded an ideology that in effect was a political religion, transcending church and state. It combined political goals and spiritual appeal into a monistic battering ram that "swept everything that stood in its path—the Weimar Republic, the Socialists, the Catholic Centre, the Catholic Corporative régime in Austria—and it has gone on sweeping things away ever since."<sup>73</sup>

While there was widespread endorsement of the Soviet system in British intellectual circles,<sup>74</sup> Dawson was influenced by continental scholars more critical of communism.<sup>75</sup> His view that communism and Christianity were absolutely antithetical has been largely substantiated by contemporary scholarship and access to Soviet archives after 1991.<sup>76</sup> Communists persecuted Christianity because it was a competitor on their ground. He thought that Bolshevism attracted the discontented and the disinherited proletariat, as well as the disinterested idealist, because "Man cannot live in a spiritual void; he needs some fixed social standards and some absolute intellectual principles. Bolshevism at least replaces the spiritual anarchy of bourgeois society by a rigid order and substitutes for the doubt and scepticism of an irresponsible intelligentsia the certitude of an absolute authority embodied in social institutions."<sup>77</sup> He explained that

Bolshevism is not a political movement that can be judged by its practical aims and achievements, nor is it an abstract

theory that can be understood apart from its historical context. It differs from other contemporary movements above all by its organic unity, its fusion of theory and practice, and by the way in which its practical policy is bound up with its philosophy. In a world of relativity and skepticism it stands for absolute principles; for a creed that is incarnate in a social order and for an authority that demands the entire allegiance of the whole man.<sup>78</sup>

Because communism demanded the allegiance of the whole man it did not function as an ordinary political party. "Thus the communist system, as planned and largely created by Lenin, was a kind of *atheocracy*, a spiritual order of the most rigid and exclusive type, rather than a political order."<sup>79</sup> It enforced discipline. Its members served the proletariat, a "mystical entity" and "universal church" of the Marxian believers. The populace was an "unregenerate mass" that it is the duty of communist leaders to guide and organize according to the principles of the true faith. "The communist is not a representative of the people: he is the priest of an idea."<sup>80</sup> In this way, though a secular creed, communism functioned as a religion.

Ironically, in a certain way, communism and the other political religions were *more* religious than the average Christian. "They refuse to divide life. They demand that the whole of life shall be devoted and dedicated to that social end which they regard as supremely valuable."<sup>81</sup> This startling insight of Dawson's is confirmed by the words of Mussolini himself:

I wanted to create the impression of a complete and rigid consistence with an ideal. This was not a scheming on my part for personal gain; it was a deep need in my nature of what I believed, and I still hold on to—as my life's dedication—namely, that once a man sets up to be the expounder of an ideal or of a new school of thought he must consistently and intensively live daily life and fight battles for the doctrines that he teaches—at any cost until victory—to the end!<sup>82</sup>

Mussolini longed to live an integrated daily life according to heroic ideals in a way analogous to the saint in the religious sphere. The political religions could likewise inspire and require the allegiance of the whole person.

Others in Britain with very different political sympathies than Dawson also used religious metaphors to describe communism. The Irish playwright and socialist George Bernard Shaw (1856–1950) wrote that “Russia has not only political and economic strength: she has also religious strength. The Russians have a creed in which they believe; and it is a catholic creed.”<sup>83</sup> Describing the new civilization arising in Russia—and hinting at their own social philosophy—the Webbs included chapters in volume two of *Soviet Communism* on, “The Remaking of Man,” “Science the Salvation of Mankind,” and, “The Good Life.” They specifically compared the Communist Party to a “typical religious order in the Roman Catholic Church” and highlighted its membership based on denial of private property, acceptance of a creed, passage through a probationary period, voluntary good social works, assessments of character, rendering of obedience, and periodic “cleansing” through “public inquisition.”<sup>84</sup> A distinctive feature for them was the new way of life inaugurated by communism—the promotion, “among all its participants, what it conceives to be ‘the good life.’”<sup>85</sup> G. D. G. and Margaret Cole noted that the Communist Party “has been likened to ... the Jesuit Order” and indeed required high levels of faith, discipline, and devotion, but in the end they denied the comparison because the members were not cut off from the world or celibate.<sup>86</sup>

### **Is Political Religion a Meaningful Concept?**

In Dawson’s thought, the concept of political religion was a tool used to compare dictatorships and try to understand their appeal in Europe after the Great War. Despite extensive recent scholarship supporting the careful use of this concept, there are some who deny that “political religion” is meaningful at all. Explicitly secular ideologies cannot be political “religions.” Richard Evans, for example, asserts that Hitler insisted that Nazism was about the here and

the now, not about a future heaven. This observation attempted to negate the very idea of Nazism as a political religion because religion, if it is anything at all, is about belief in the supernatural, in the eternal, in God. While Nazism did borrow language and ritual from religion, Evans says, it appealed not so much to those looking for spiritual fulfilment in a secular age as to the most secularized part of the population, the organized working class.<sup>87</sup>

While Evans's skepticism is useful, there are compelling reasons to disagree with his conclusion. First, there is the evidence of the many contemporaries of Dawson, from a variety of political backgrounds, who explained the new political developments they witnessed in terms of political religion. Second, a growing body of scholarship has fruitfully examined in detail the language, rituals, and appeal of the totalitarian movements.

Third, there is an alternative understanding of religion than that of Evans, who in his essay seems to view religion solely as "church" or belief in the supernatural. This was the view of the old ecclesiastical history that studied religion in terms of doctrine and institutions. However, developments in the philosophy of religion, anthropology, and sociology of the early twentieth century expanded the concept of religion beyond simply that of "church." They made it possible to think in terms of political or secular religion. Two thinkers especially important in this development were the German theologian Rudolf Otto (1869–1937) and the French sociologist Émile Durkheim (1858–1917).

The historian Emilio Gentile argues that political religion became a plausible concept when considering the idea of the "sacred" developed by Rudolf Otto in *The Idea of the Holy*. In Otto's thought, the political dimension of human life could be a place of sacred experience "as frequently occurs during times of great collective emotion such as wars or revolutions."<sup>88</sup> Collective experience of the *mysterium tremendum*, the fascinating-terrifying manifestation of immense, mysterious, and majestic power, can develop into beliefs and myths connected to a secular entity (such as nation, state, revolution, war, humanity, society, race, proletariat, liberty), as happened during and after the Great War.<sup>89</sup> An example

of such an experience comes from Melita Maschmann's memoirs of the Nazi takeover in January 1933 and the massive demonstration in Berlin:

On the evening of January 30 my parents took us children, my twin brother and myself, into the centre of the city. There we witnessed the torchlight procession with which the National Socialists celebrated their victory. Some of the uncanny feel of that night remains with me even today. The crashing tread of the feet, the sombre pomp of the red and black flags, the flickering torches on the faces and the songs with melodies that were at once aggressive and sentimental. ...

I longed to hurl myself into this current, to be submerged and borne along by it. ...

I was overcome with a burning desire to belong to these people for whom it was a matter of life and death.<sup>90</sup>

This description captures the awe, energy, and majestic power of a movement that spoke to the longing of Maschmann and many others of her generation to belong to something greater than themselves.

The transference of the sacred to earthly objects is called "sacralization." While he did not use the term, Dawson essentially described it when he wrote in 1936 about the transference of religious faith and emotion to secular objects in the political movements of his day.<sup>91</sup> When this happens, "nation," "race," or "class" become absolute principles of collective existence and the main source of values. They are objects of "veneration and dedication, even to the point of self-sacrifice."<sup>92</sup> Society can set up its own gods, Durkheim remarked, as during the early years of the French Revolution when secular objects such as homeland, liberty, and reason were transformed into sacred things.<sup>93</sup>

If the sacred could be transferred to such objects, those objects could then function as the basis of a moral community. This was the functionalist insight of Émile Durkheim: religion shaped society in an all-embracing way. Dawson drew much from this sociological

perspective on religion, although he was more influenced by Ernst Troeltsch<sup>94</sup> and the Boasian tradition of anthropology<sup>95</sup> than by Durkheim. Thus, in *Progress and Religion*, as quoted earlier, Dawson wrote: "Every living culture must possess some spiritual dynamic, which provides the energy necessary for that sustained social effort which is civilization. Normally this dynamic is supplied by a religion, but in exceptional circumstances the religious impulse may disguise itself under philosophical or political forms."<sup>96</sup> Such a sociological view of religion is unthinkable in terms of the old ecclesiastical history. However, by focusing on the important function of religion in historic human cultures, and on the possibility of the sacralization of worldly entities, it became possible for Dawson and others to see the totalitarian movements in terms of political religion.

Obviously, Lenin, Mussolini, and Hitler did not found supernatural religions. They founded decidedly secular systems. Nevertheless, those systems did resemble Durkheim's 1912 description of religion as a "*unified system of beliefs and practices relative to sacred things, that is to say, things set apart and surrounded by prohibitions—beliefs and practices that unite its adherents in a single moral community called a church.* ... [T]he idea of church suggests that religion must be something eminently collective."<sup>97</sup> In the case of the political ideologies, the "sacred things" that were "set apart" were the social *ends* that were absolute (e.g., racial purity or the classless society). Dawson wrote that the "determination to build Jerusalem, at once and on the spot, is the very force which is responsible for the intolerance and violence of the new political order."<sup>98</sup> The social ends of fascism, communism, and Nazism caused them to function as political religions.

In terms of this functionalist approach to religion, A. James Gregor offers a clear test that one is dealing with a political religion:

Throughout history, one of the most important functions of religion has been to explain the ultimate origin and goal of created beings—and thereby to specifically provide codes

of conduct, the grounds for moral judgment, the identification of infractions, the depiction of public purposes, as well as the prescription of individual and collective ends. When a subset of political ideologies expressly assumes such metaphysical and normative responsibilities, it can be spoken of as a “political religion.”<sup>99</sup>

In other words, contrary to Evans, even if Hitler denied any supernatural purposes in Nazism, if Nazism took on the metaphysical and normative functions of religion, then it is a “political religion.” Evidence supports the view that Nazism did so intend: the race as the highest good, the political cults, rituals, festivals, sacred spaces, sacred days, martyrs, rallies, and the moral revolution that saw the human will as the ultimate source of moral values and Hitler as the embodiment of that sacred will.<sup>100</sup> Thus, in a speech of April 12, 1922, Hitler told his audience that the mighty mission of the Nazi movement was to give the searching masses a new and strong belief “to which they will swear and abide by.”<sup>101</sup> Joseph Goebbels (1897–1945), a close associate of Hitler, wrote to the future Führer in 1926:

You gave a name to the suffering of an entire generation who were yearning for real men, for meaningful tasks. ... What you uttered is the catechism of a new political credo amid the desperation of a collapsing, godless world. You did not fall silent. A god gave you the strength to voice our suffering. You formulated our torment in redemptive words, formed statements of confidence in the coming miracle.<sup>102</sup>

Clearly, here was a man searching for meaning so intensely that he felt compelled to use religious metaphors to describe it. Later, as Reich Minister of Propaganda, Goebbels told journalists that the purpose of propaganda was to “work on people until they are addicted to us” and that the “propagandist must be the man with the greatest knowledge of souls.”<sup>103</sup>

Communism also intended to take the functions of religion despite (because of?) its hostility to religion. Representative evidence from the Soviet Union includes a party directive of 1923 concerning the destruction of the religious beliefs of workers and peasants. This would require "systematic propaganda" linking religion to the interests of the ruling classes and replacing "outmoded" religious ideas with clear "scientific views of nature and human society." It would be necessary to publish easy-to-read pamphlets and leaflets that "answer questions about the origins of the world, of life and the essence of human relations."<sup>104</sup> Clearly, the communist intended to take over the metaphysical and normative function of religion.

A final example comes from Mussolini, who in an article on fascism wrote in 1932 that

[t]he Fascist conception of life is a religious one, in which man is viewed in his immanent relation to a higher law, endowed with an objective will transcending the individual and raising him to conscious membership of a spiritual society. ... The Fascist state is an inwardly accepted standard and rule of conduct, a discipline of the whole person; it permeates the will no less than the intellect. It stands for a principle which becomes the central motive of man as a member of civilized society, sinking deep down into his personality; it dwells in the heart of the man of action and of the thinker, of the artist and of the man of science: soul of the soul.<sup>105</sup>

Mussolini himself describes fascism essentially as a political religion that permeates all of life to the depths of the human soul. Clearly, the concept of political religion is necessary to understand the significance of fascism, Nazism, and communism.

### Conclusion

Hans Maier notes that the phenomenon of political religion "reminds us that religion does not allow itself to be easily banished

from society, and that, where this is tried, it returns in unpredictable and perverted forms.”<sup>106</sup> Dawson’s sensitivity to the place of religion in human life and history, developed in his scholarship of the 1920s and early 1930s, led him to the same conclusion. In a secular age the function of religion in society could be taken over by political ideologies. A spiritual vacuum could not last—the drive that pushes humans toward *meaning* was irresistible. Politicians who understood how to manipulate this vacuum could tap into tremendous power. By rejecting the classical liberal ideal of relegating religion to the private sphere, they could create, instead, a religion of politics, tapping into the deeper parts of the human person. As Dawson grasped, Mussolini, Hitler, and Lenin created systems that appealed to the whole man. They sought to transcend the distinction between church and state to create an all-encompassing moral community. They sacralized worldly objects that could inspire life, sacrifice, and acceptance of death in their followers. Dawson’s view of political religion arose out of this understanding of human nature and the world-historical relationship between religion and culture *applied to the twentieth century*. That is his essential contribution to the scholarship on political religion.

### Endnotes

1. Alexis de Tocqueville, *The Old Régime and the French Revolution*, trans. Stuart Gilbert (New York: Doubleday Anchor Books, 1955), 156.
2. A. J. P. Taylor, *English History: 1914–1945* (London: Book Club Associates, 1965), 1.
3. Ibid., 76; “The War Cabinet, 1917,” in *British Government 1914–1953: Select Documents*, ed. G. H. L. Le May (London: Mathuen, 1955), 229.
4. Taylor, 2.
5. Christopher Dawson, “The Claims of Politics,” *Scrutiny* VIII, no. 2 (1939): 136. This article is reprinted in this journal issue.
6. Hans Maier, “Concepts for the Comparison of Dictatorships: ‘Totalitarianism’ and ‘Political Religions,’” in *Totalitarianism and Political Religions*, ed. Hans Maier (New York: Routledge, 1996), 199–201.
7. Jens Petersen, “The History of the Concept of Totalitarianism in Italy,” in *Totalitarianism and Political Religions*, ed. Hans Maier (New York: Routledge, 1996), 6.

8. Benito Mussolini, "The Doctrine of Fascism," 1932, <http://www.milestonedocuments.com/documents/view/benito-mussolinisthe-doctrine-of-fascism/text>.
9. A. James Gregor, *Totalitarianism and Political Religion: An Intellectual History* (Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 2012), 5.
10. Christopher Dawson, *Beyond Politics* (London: Sheed & Ward, 1939), 104, 105.
11. Adam Schwartz, "Confronting the 'Totalitarian Antichrist': Christopher Dawson and Totalitarianism," *Catholic Historical Review* 89 (July 2003): 464–488.
12. Hans Maier, "Political Religion: A Concept and Its Limitations," *Totalitarian Movements and Political Religions* VIII, (2007): 9–10.
13. Michael Burleigh, *Earthly Powers: Religion and Politics in Europe from the French Revolution to the Great War* (New York: HarperCollins, 2005) and *Sacred Causes: Religion and Politics from the Great War to the War on Terror* (New York: Harper Perennial, 2008).
14. Emilio Gentile, *Politics as Religion*, trans. George Staunton (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2006).
15. Maier, "Political Religion: A Concept and Its Limitations."
16. Gentile, xiv.
17. Maier, "Political Religion: A Concept and Its Limitations," 15.
18. John Alzog, *Manual of Universal Church History*, trans. F. J. Pabisch and Thomas S. Byrne, vol. 1 (Cincinnati, OH: Robert Clarke, 1874), 7–9.
19. Christopher Dawson, *Progress and Religion: An Historical Enquiry* (Washington, D.C.: Catholic University of America Press, 2001), 81.
20. *Ibid.*, 3–4.
21. Dawson, *Beyond Politics*, 3.
22. Eric Voegelin, *The Political Religions*, ed. Manfred Henningsen, trans. Virginia Ann Schildauer, *The Collected Words of Eric Voegelin*, vol. 5 (Columbia: University of Missouri Press, 2000). Originally published in 1938 in Vienna and quickly suppressed by authorities.
23. Burleigh, *Earthly Powers*, 17–22; Burleigh, *Sacred Causes*, 86–87.
24. Scott says in her biography that Dawson "had started to write a book on the French Revolution, when at the beginning of 1936 he had a serious illness." See Scott, *A Historian and His World: A Life of Christopher Dawson*, 127. In a footnote she remarked that this was posthumously published as *The Gods of Revolution*. Thus, Dawson wrote some if not much of this book in the 1930s, although he made some changes later; in fact, the last chapter mentioned the Second World War. As Scott recorded: "In 1938 Frank Sheed was anxiously pressing Christopher to

finish his book on the French Revolution but he was to be disappointed for by this time he [Dawson] had turned again to solving the problems of the day in a successor to *Religion and the Modern State* entitled *Beyond Politics*. ... *The Gods of Revolution* was to be originally entitled *The European Revolution*, as is found in the Dawson archive at the University of St. Thomas (box 3, folders 27–34). Manuscripts of eight chapters are here. The fact that the bibliography in the 1972 publication refers to no scholarship more recent than 1935 strongly suggests that the composition of the book largely took place during the 1930s.

25. Christopher Dawson, *The Gods of Revolution* (London: Sidgwick & Jackson, 1972), 101–105.
26. *Ibid.*, 75.
27. Alexis de Tocqueville wrote that the leaders of the French Revolution “had a fanatical faith in their vocation—that of transforming the social system, root and branch, and regenerating the whole human race. Of this passionate idealism was born what was in fact a new religion, giving rise to some of those vast changes in human conduct that religion has produced in other ages.” Tocqueville, *The Old Régime and the French Revolution*, 156.
28. Dawson, *Beyond Politics*, 71.
29. *Ibid.*, 72.
30. Burleigh, *Earthly Powers*; Gentile, 26–29.
31. Burleigh, *Sacred Causes*, 51.
32. George L. Mosse, “Fascism and the French Revolution,” *Journal of Contemporary History* 24, no. 1 (1989): 5–26.
33. Such as Christopher Dawson, “Religion in the Age of Revolution,” *The Tablet*, August 29; September 5, 12; October 10, 24, 1936; Christopher Dawson, *The Movement Towards Christian Unity in the Nineteenth Century* (Latrobe, PA: Saint Vincent Archabbey, 2006). This latter source was the Wimmer Lecture for 1960.
34. Such as Christopher Dawson, *Progress and Religion* and *The Movement of World Revolution* (Washington, D.C.: Catholic University of America Press, 2013).
35. Christopher Dawson, *The Spirit of the Oxford Movement* (London: Saint Austin, 2001).
36. *Ibid.*, xi, xii, 10–11.
37. Christopher Dawson, “The Crisis of the West,” *Dublin Review* CLXXXI (1927): 267; “The Problem of Wealth,” *Spectator* CXLVII (1931): 485; *Religion and the Modern State* (New York: Sheed & Ward, 1935), 1; and *Beyond Politics*, 75.

38. Dawson, *Progress and Religion*, 178.
39. Dawson, *Religion and the Modern State*, 44. Later Dawson interpreted the political crisis of the twentieth century in terms of the general secularization of Europe after the Reformation; see Christopher Dawson, *The Judgment of the Nations* (New York: Sheed & Ward, 1942).
40. Burleigh, *Earthly Powers*, 2, 9.
41. Viktor E. Frankl, *Man's Search for Meaning: An Introduction to Logotherapy* (New York: Pocket Books, 1963), 61, 167–171.
42. Christopher Dawson, “The Politics of Hegel,” *Dublin Review* 212, no. 427 (1943): 97, 105; Gregor, chapter 2.
43. Georges Eugène Sorel (1847–1922) was a French philosopher and theorist of revolutionary syndicalism. His notion of the power of myth in people's lives inspired Marxists and Fascists. Born in Cherbourg, France, Sorel worked as an engineer for years before completely devoting himself to study and writing. His 1908 book *Réflexions sur la violence* argued that the success of the proletariat class depended on violent revolution. Sorel was influenced by Tocqueville, Proudhon, Nietzsche, Marx, and others.
44. Filippo Tommaso Emilio Marinetti (1876–1944) was an Italian poet and editor, the founder of the Futurist movement, and a fascist ideologue. He lived and studied in Egypt and France, was trained as a lawyer, and decided to devote his life to literary pursuits. His *Futurist Manifesto* (1909) initiated an artistic philosophy, Futurism, which was a rejection of the past and a celebration of speed, machinery, violence, youth, and industry. Marinetti became an active supporter of Benito Mussolini.
45. Gabriele D'Annunzio (1863–1938) was an Italian poet, journalist, novelist, and dramatist who influenced the Italian fascist movement. Born to the wealthy mayor of Abruzzo, D'Annunzio studied at the University of Rome La Sapienza. He invented much of the ritual (balcony speeches, the Roman salute, the use of religious symbols in a secular setting) later used by his rival Mussolini during his (D'Annunzio's) occupation of Fiume and his leadership of the Italian Regency of Carnaro from 1919–1920. Despite their great differences, both he and Mussolini “attempted to transform their countrymen into more heroic types, rejecting the Italian tradition of civility in favor of an ethic of violence and imperialism.” See Michael A. Ledeen, *The First Duce: D'Annunzio at Fiume* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1977), viii.
46. Dawson, “The Claims of Politics,” 139.
47. Fascist Anthem: “Youth,” in Marla Stone, *The Fascist Revolution in Italy: A Brief History with Documents* (Boston: Bedford/St. Martin's, 2013), 68–69.

48. Christopher Dawson, "Conservatism," University of St. Thomas Archives, Christopher Dawson Collection, box 3, folder 38. This unpublished lecture was edited by myself and published in *The Political Science Reviewer* XXXIX (2010): 232–262. Viewing the appeal of socialism in religious terms was not exclusive to conservatives like Dawson. For example, the poet and historian A. L. Rowse (1903–1997), a socialist during the interwar years, wrote the following: "One great political movement, more than any other, has the power of attracting devotion to it, and unpaid service and unquestioning loyalty like a religion; it is this power that drives the Labour Party on. ... Of this movement, perhaps it is only certain groups, like the Independent Labour Party, the communists and the pacifists, who find in their politics a complete substitution for religion. These people have found in it an idealism, which influences their lives and for good, a way of life more exacting, which demands above all the submergence of self and common-mindedness. What are these but characteristics of religion?" See *Politics and the Younger Generation* (London: Faber & Faber, 1931), 200. Another example comes from the opening sentence of *Forward from Liberalism* (1937) by the (at that time) communist-leaning poet and novelist Stephen Spender (1909–1995). "Religion is politics, and politics is Brotherhood," wrote William Blake. These words take us back to the time when Thomas Paine, his friend William Blake, Godwin, and later the romantics, inspired by events in France and America, believed that their political faith, interpreted in action, would overthrow kings and tyrants and make all men brothers. Politics became a religion without God, that is to say, a way of life." Later on, Spender affirmed that the "communist faith" and "communist morality" are a "way of life" but should not be referred to as a "religion" because religion possesses aims that are not realizable in this life. See Stephen Spender, *Forward from Liberalism* (London: Victor Gollancz, 1937), 13, 23–24. After the Second World War, Spender distanced himself from some of his more communist views of the 1930s.
49. Simon Schama, "Flaubert in the Trenches," *The New Yorker* 72, no. 6 (April 1, 1996): 97.
50. Dawson, *Religion and the Modern State*, 1–2.
51. *Ibid.*, 2.
52. Carl Schmitt, *The Necessity of Politics* (London: Sheed & Ward, 1931); introduction by Christopher Dawson, 19.
53. Dawson, *Religion and the Modern State*, 2.

54. This is in fact a new field of research today sharing common ground with the cultural history of the Great War—see James F. McMillan, “Writing the Spiritual History of the First World War,” in *Religie: Godsdienst En Geweld in De Twintigste Eeuw*, ed. Madelon de Keizer (Zutphen: Walburg, 2006), 47, 49, 53.
55. Dawson, *Religion and the Modern State*, 3.
56. John Maynard Keynes, *The Economic Consequences of the Peace* (New York: Harcourt, Brace & Howe, 1920), 249–251.
57. Burleigh, *Sacred Causes*, 20–22.
58. Roy H. Schoeman, *Salvation Is from the Jews: The Role of Judaism in Salvation History from Abraham to the Second Coming* (San Francisco, CA: Ignatius, 2003), 195, 205, 207.
59. Burleigh, *Sacred Causes*, 8. Burleigh cites Horst Möller, *Europa zwischen den Weltkriegen* (Munich, 1998), 122.
60. Maier, “Political Religion: A Concept and Its Limitations,” 15.
61. Christopher Dawson, “The Significance of Bolshevism,” in *Enquiries into Religion and Culture* (London: Sheed & Ward, 1933), 23.
62. Martin Gilbert, *A History of the Twentieth Century: 1900–1933*, vol. 1 (New York: William Morrow, 1997), 446; Richard Pipes, *A Concise History of the Russian Revolution* (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1995), 122.
63. Stone, 9.
64. Benito Mussolini, *My Autobiography*, trans. Richard Washburn Child (London: Hutchinson, 1939), 64–66, 74.
65. Burleigh, *Sacred Causes*, 56–57; Gilbert, 546.
66. Dawson, *Religion and the Modern State*, 10.
67. Adolf Hitler, *Mein Kampf*, vol. 1 (1925), chapter 7, [http://archive.org/stream/meinkampf035176mbp/meinkampf035176mbp\\_djvu.txt](http://archive.org/stream/meinkampf035176mbp/meinkampf035176mbp_djvu.txt).
68. Burleigh, *Sacred Causes*, 103.
69. Taylor, 163.
70. Christopher Dawson, “Hitler’s *Mein Kampf*, *Tablet* (March 1939), 373.
71. Winston Churchill, “Hitler and His Choice,” in *Great Contemporaries*, ed. James W. Muller (Wilmington, DE: ISI Books, 2012), 252, 257.
72. Christopher Dawson, *The Power of the Spirit (Sword of the Spirit Pamphlet)* (London: 1943), 8–9. This obscure pamphlet is available in the British Library.
73. *Ibid.*, 9. See also Dawson, “Hitler’s *Mein Kampf*.”
74. Richard Overy, *The Morbid Age: Britain between the Wars* (London: Allen Lane, 2009), 282, 288.
75. The Romanian-born René Fueleop-Miller (1891–1963) published his *Geist und Gesicht des Bolschewismus* in 1926. It was translated by

- F. S. Flint and D. F. Tait as *The Mind and Face of Bolshevism* (1927). Fueleop-Miller wrote: "Anyone trained in the exact methods of thought of the West can see nothing in this Bolshevik materialism but one of those substitute religions which, since the decay of the earlier faith centred in the Church and the rise of scientific rationalism, have continually kept springing up to provide humanity with a new creed in place of the faith they have lost, and to satisfy their eternal yearning for freedom from all evil in new forms adapted to the scientific spirit of the present time." René Fueleop-Miller, *The Mind and Face of Bolshevism* (New York: Harper Torchbooks, 1965), 71. Dawson referenced this book in his article "The New Leviathan," 96. The Russian-born Waldemar Gurian (1902–1954) published his *Der Bolschewismus: Einführung in Geschichte und Lehre* in 1931. It was translated into English by Dawson's friend, E. I. Watkin, as *Bolshevism: Theory and Practice* (1932). It was also translated into French, Italian, and Dutch. Dawson drew from this book in his article "The Significance of Bolshevism," referenced below. On Gurian, see Heinz Hürten, "Waldemar Gurian and the Development of the Concept of Totalitarianism," in *Totalitarianism and Political Religions*, ed. Hans Maier (New York: Routledge, 1996).
76. Mattei Ion Radu, "Dawson and Communism: How Much Did He Get Right?" *Political Science Reviewer*, 41, no. 2 (2017): 276–302.
  77. Dawson, "The Significance of Bolshevism," 21, 26–27.
  78. *Ibid.*, 21.
  79. *Ibid.*, 24.
  80. *Ibid.*, 22.
  81. Dawson, *Beyond Politics*, 105.
  82. Mussolini, *My Autobiography*, 51.
  83. George Bernard Shaw, "Fabianism in Action," *Times*, 13 August 1931, 6. He continued: "To call them religious, and the Third International a Catholic Church, seems to them a Shavian joke, as it may seem to some of our own Catholics a Shavian blasphemy."
  84. Sidney Webb and Beatrice Webb, *Soviet Communism: A New Civilisation?* (New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1936), I: 340, 342, 345, 348, 376.
  85. *Ibid.*, II: 807.
  86. G. D. G. Cole and Margaret Cole, *A Guide to Modern Politics* (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1934), 187, 189–90.
  87. Richard J. Evans, "Nazism, Christianity and Political Religion: A Debate," *Journal of Contemporary History* 42, no. 1 (2007): 6.
  88. Emilio Gentile, "The Sacralization of Politics: Definitions, Interpretations and Reflections on the Question of Secular Religion and

- Totalitarianism,” *Totalitarian Movements and Political Religions* I (2000): 29. Article translated by Robert Mallett.
89. Gentile, *Politics as Religion*, 10.
90. Melita Maschmann, “A German Teenager’s Response to the Nazi Takeover in January 1933,” in Robert G. Moeller, *The Nazi State and Germany Society: A Brief History with Documents* (Boston: Bedford/St. Martin’s, 2010), 46–47. Moeller cites Maschmann’s *Account Rendered: A Dossier on My Former Self*, trans. by Geoffrey Strachan (London: Abelard-Schuman, 1964), 10–12, 16.
91. Christopher Dawson, “Religion in an Age of Revolution,” *Tablet* CLXVIII (October 1936): 550.
92. Gentile, “The Sacralization of Politics: Definitions, Interpretations and Reflections on the Question of Secular Religion and Totalitarianism,” 18–19.
93. Émile Durkheim, *The Elementary Forms of Religious Life*, trans. Carol Cosman (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2001), 161.
94. Ernst Troeltsch (1865–1923), German theologian, historian, and sociologist; 1919–1921 member of the Prussian Landtag; friend of, and greatly admired by, Friedrich von Hügel; friend of Max Weber; and author of, for example, *Die Soziallehren der Christlichen Kirchen und Gruppen* (published as *The Social Teaching of the Christian Churches* in 1931), a book that appeared in the bibliography of Dawson’s *Making of Europe* (1932) and was highly praised (and used) in Dawson, *The Judgment of the Nations*, 40–41, 44. When asked who were the most important influences on his sociological ideas, Dawson would invariably reply, “Troeltsch and Le Play”; see Scott, *A Historian and His World*, 72. Troeltsch was not a scholar Dawson directly engaged with throughout his writings; the influence was one more of overall, general perspective. For example, in *The Social Teaching*, Troeltsch begins his historical and sociological study with questions posed about his present, about the social confusion of his present day and relationship between the state and society. “What should be the attitude of the churches toward the modern social problem?” he asked; see Ernst Troeltsch, *The Social Teaching of the Christian Churches*, trans. Olive Wyon, vol. I (New York: Macmillan, 1931), 24. This beginning of study by posing questions about the present day was very much like Dawson’s approach. Troeltsch’s method in *The Social Teaching* was to examine the points of influence in the course of history between Christianity and the social order (family, economic life, politics, and intellectual life). Troeltsch’s fundamentally historical and sociological approach to Christian teaching was an essential component of Dawson’s own work.

95. The works of Alfred Kroeber, Robert Lowie, Clark Wissler, and Ruth Benedict, who were all trained by the German-born “founder of American anthropology” Franz Boas, appeared in the notes and bibliographies of Dawson’s *Age of the Gods* (1928), *Progress and Religion* (1929), and *Religion and Culture* (1948). For a summary of the contribution of Boasian anthropology, see Mark W. Risjord, “Ethnography and Culture,” in *Philosophy of Anthropology and Sociology*, eds. Stephen P. Turner and Mark W. Risjord (Amsterdam: North-Holland, 2007).
96. Dawson, *Progress and Religion*, 3–4.
97. Durkheim, 46. Emilio Gentile writes: “‘Totalitarianism’ has not only an institutional significance, applicable to a system of government and a method of government, but is also indicative of a *political process* activated by a revolutionary party in order to transform the people into a harmonious collective” (emphasis in the original). See Gentile, “The Sacralization of Politics: Definitions, Interpretations and Reflections on the Question of Secular Religion and Totalitarianism,” 21. He continued: “Modernity has not eliminated the problem of religion from the consciousness of modern man. In fact, precisely because it has been a radical, overwhelming and irreversible force for change that has swept away age-old collective beliefs and age-old, powerful institutions, modernity has created crisis and disorientation—situations which have, in turn, led to the re-emergence of the religious question, even if this has led the individual to turn not to traditional religion, but to new religions that sacralize the human” (31).
98. Dawson, *Religion and the Modern State*, 109.
99. Gregor, 9–10.
100. Burleigh, *Sacred Causes*, 94–118; Angela Astoria Kurtz, “God, Not Caesar: Revisiting National Socialism as ‘Political Religion,’” *History of European Ideas* 35, no. 2 (2009): 241; Maier, “Political Religion: A Concept and Its Limitations,” 7.
101. Adolf Hitler, “Anti-Semitic Speech,” April 12, 1922, in Moeller, 38. Moeller cites *Hitler’s Third Reich: A Documentary History*, ed. by Louis L. Snyder (Chicago: Nelson-Hall, 1988), 27–30.
102. Ralf Georg Reuth, *Goebbels*, trans. Krishna Winston (New York: Harcourt Brace, 1993), 54. Reuth cites Joseph Goebbels, “Die Führerfrage,” in Goebbels, *Die zweite Revolution: Briefe an Zeitgenossen* (Zwickau, 1926), 7.
103. Joseph Goebbels, “The Tasks of the Ministry for Propaganda,” March 15, 1933, in Moeller, 58. Moeller cites *The Third Reich: Politics and*

*Propaganda*, by David Welch, 2nd ed. (London: Routledge, 2002), 173–175.

104. Communist Party Directive, 1923, in Robert Weinberg and Laurie Bernstein, *Revolutionary Russia: A History in Documents* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2011), 98–99.
105. Benito Mussolini, “The Doctrine of Fascism.”
106. Maier, “Political Religion: A Concept and Its Limitations,” 15.